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Emese Kürti, Zsuzsa László (eds.)

WHAT WILL BE ALREADY EXISTS

Temporalities of Cold War Archives
in East-Central Europe and Beyond

[transcript] Image

Emese Kürti, Zsuzsa László (eds.)
What Will Be Already Exists

Emese Kürti (PhD) is an art historian, researcher, and art critic, the head of Artpool Art Research Center, and deputy director for research at Central European Research Institute for Art History Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Her dissertation set the ground for a new narrative of Hungarian action art based on a musical genealogy. In the last few years, she has been focusing on the transregional artistic collaborations between Hungary and Yugoslavia, and the self-historicizing and institutional ambitions of the neo-avant-garde. Among several other publications on the above themes, she is the author of *Screaming Hole: Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik*, 2017.

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Emese Kürti, Zsuzsa László (eds.)

What Will Be Already Exists

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[transcript]

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Introduction

Zsuzsa László

Therefore freedom is a twofold determination in time.

Miklós Erdély, "Time Möbius"¹

Time Travelers: The Conception of Artpool

Möbius Film, showing a looped montage of presidents shaking hands, perpetually flipping their position from left to right and back, was screened in 1972 by the Hungarian artist Miklós Erdély (1928–1986) in György Galántai's Chapel Studio.² In his later text "Time Möbius," quoted above and paraphrased in the title of this book, Erdély provides various poetical and paradoxical approximations of a kind of exchange relationship between our past and future selves mutually determining each other. Erdély, though a well-informed and active member of the innermost circles of the Hungarian neo-avant-garde, was also committed to distancing himself from the artistic trends current at the time, putting them in a wider historical perspective and finding digressive references in scientific or esoteric literature, psychology, or the daily press. When György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay founded Artpool in 1979 in Budapest and

1 This line is taken from Erdély's poem "Idő-möbiusz" published in *Sorozatművek* (Serial works), exhibition catalog (Székesfehérvár: Csók István Képtár, 1976/77), 34–35. The poem was published in English as part of Sven Spieker's "Texts by Conceptual Artists from Eastern Europe: Hungary" in *Post: Notes on Art in a Global Context* (blog), Museum of Modern Art, November 1, 2017, <https://post.moma.org/texts-by-conceptual-artists-from-eastern-europe-hungary/4/>.

2 László Beke, "Film Möbius-szalagra: Erdély Miklós munkásságáról" (Film on Möbius strip—On Miklós Erdély's work) *Filmvilág* (September 1987): 46.

started its ambitious projects based on Galántai's Active Archive manifesto,³ Erdély's speculative, maverick attitude toward personal and historical time, and thus to art history, remained a formative experience. Artpool started out as an underground initiative with the aim to share and generate information on art practices not supported by the state-socialist regime. It continued the heritage of the Chapel Studio, a self-organized summer art space run by Galántai between 1970 and 1973 in the town of Balatonboglár, Hungary. Artpool primarily focused on local and international versions of conceptual, correspondence, and performance art, visual poetry, Fluxus, and other experimental art movements—and, no less importantly, on the perpetual reconceptualization of itself as an art institution.

Another inspiration came from the cooperation between Galántai and the Italian artist and collector G. A. Cavellini (1914–1990) involving his concept of *autostoricizzazione* (self-historicization). Similarly to Erdély's *Time Travel* photo series (1976) but more focused on self-promotion, Cavellini inscribed and fictionalized himself into history and the history of art as a time traveler. Artpool's collaboration with Cavellini culminated in Galántai and Klaniczay's *Life of the Statue Vivante*, a series of actions performed creating and wearing purpose-made outfits inscribed by Cavellini with the most important names of art history—a photo of one of these actions is featured on the cover of this book. The first of these actions, the iconic *Homage to Vera Mukhina*, took place in 1980 at Heroes' Square in Budapest, when Galántai and Klaniczay reenacted the Soviet sculptor Vera Mukhina's *Worker and Kolkhoz Woman* (1937), though holding not a hammer and sickle but an art history book with a reproduction of the 1937 statue.⁴ The performance series signifies an attitude toward history and self-historicization that, instead of trying to invent something never seen before, or determine the next step of (art) history, contrasts the live presence of the performers with the canon and the institutions of art history, and with public memorials and the museum's historical narrative. These *statues vivante*, revealing themselves as time travelers from the future, later

3 György Galántai, "Active Archive, 1979–2003," in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, https://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

4 Detailed documentation and description of all the performances of this project can be found in: Júlia Klaniczay, ed., *A Mukhina Projekt: Létértelmezések Galántai György életművében = The Mukhina Project: Interpretations of Being in György Galántai's Oeuvre* (Budapest: Vintage Galéria, 2018) and at: <https://artpool.hu/Galantai/perform/Muhina/>.

visited an exhibition historicizing the art of the 1950s, which transformed socialist realism, originally a worldview, into an art-historical style of the past.⁵ Galántai and Klaniczay's performance in that exhibition, in turn, distanced the museum's historical narrative into a background of objects that had lost their meanings but still surrounded the performers as an environment and a resource. Art history is transformed to material history, to an archive, from which we are not to learn, but in which we are to recognize the traces of yet-to-be-developed potentialities: objects for *transfunctionings*.⁶ The third iteration—a scene from which is reproduced on this book's cover—took place in the storage rooms of the Savaria Museum in Szombathely, where the living statues playfully objectify themselves again, only to act out the “disturbing strangeness”⁷ of the museumized objects taken out of time, in contrast to the empowered subjects of live art. The *statues vivants* of Galántai and Klaniczay embody the “active archive,” which serves as a critical institution and an art project at the same time, researching the future while archiving the present and structuring the past. As Galántai stated, an active archive “generates the very material to be archived” through cooperation, exchange, and building of non-hierarchical networks, as well as through combining art-historical and artistic methodologies of research. It is future-oriented and employs a dynamic approach to history “as an open artwork and as an activist artistic practice.”⁸ Thus Artpool's mission was and still is not only to preserve collected documents but also to feed them back into projects that circulate information internationally and provoke yet-to-be-realized ideas.

5 *A huszadik század magyar művészete: Az “ötvenes évek” = Hungarian Art of the Twentieth Century: The “Fifties,”* exhibition catalog, curated by Péter Kovács and Márta Kovalovszky (Székesfehérvár: István Király Múzeum, 1981).

6 *Transfunctioning* is a term frequently used by György Galántai from 1974 on in connection with his artistic practice, especially his sculpture; see *Galántai: Életmunkák 1968–1993 = Galántai: Lifeworks 1968–1993*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool; Enciklopédia, 1996), 105–11.

7 Zolt K. Horváth referred to Michel de Certeau's term from *L'écriture de l'histoire*, which was published in English as *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), in connection with the paradox of the museumization of the avant-garde and also Artpool's Active Archive concept. See Zolt K. Horváth, “Lehetséges-e egyáltalán? Az avantgárd képzeletbeli archívuma,” *MúzeumCafé* 55–56 (2006): 168–80.

8 Galántai, “Active Archive.”

Artpool functioned as a parallel institution for ten years, running a “periodic” exhibition program, realizing events across a range of different venues,⁹ publishing an art magazine, *Artpool Letter*,¹⁰ organizing international correspondence art projects, and accumulating an indispensable archive of Fluxus, mail art, and experimental practices. Following the regime change in 1989 it was able to be converted to an NGO, and now, more than forty years after its founding, it operates as a department of Hungary’s largest art institution, the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. During the years of its independent operations, Artpool endeavored to build up both the conceptual and practical frameworks of a public art institution composed of annually changing but interconnected research topics,¹¹ international networking projects, collaborations with universities, running an exhibition space, organizing public art projects, developing summer exhibitions in Kapolcs, launching, in 1995, one of the first art websites in Hungary, and systematically collecting, researching, publishing, exhibiting, digitizing, and historicizing the documents of neo-avant-garde and contemporary art, as well as Artpool’s own history. This uncompromisingly ambitious program was increasingly disrupted by funding difficulties, as well as the challenge of professional sustainability. Several art historians participated in the projects, but the institution was still run by its founders, who redefined their roles from time to time.

“Artpool 40” Conference and Artist Archives in Eastern Europe

Whereas this institutional evolution constitutes a unique case study, Artpool has always sought to interpret the context of its activities and its own history translocally, within Eastern Europe and also as part of a decentralized

9 This program was called Artpool’s Periodical Space (APS) and consisted of fourteen art events realized at different venues between 1979 and 1984. See Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive*, 36–85; and <https://artpool.hu/events79-91.html>.

10 AL, which stood for *Aktuális Levél* (current letter) used in English as *Artpool Letter*, was a self-published, bookwork-like photocopied art magazine, which had eleven issues and was circulated in print runs of 300 to 500 copies between 1983 and 1985. For images and content summaries, see: <https://artpool.hu/Al/al01.html>.

11 For instance, 1993 was the year of Fluxus, 1994 was devoted to Miklós Erdély, 1996 to the internet, and 1999 to contexts. The program from 2000 to 2009 was organized around the conceptual interpretation of each numeral, zero through nine: <https://www.artpool.hu/events-from92.html>.

network. Though timelines differ locally, in the second half of the Cold War so-called parallel cultural spheres were developed in many Eastern European countries governed by state-socialist regimes that assigned some degree of political-ideological control over art institutions. With links to both the peripheries of state institutions and the grey zones between them, as well as to dissident movements, this network of self-organized initiatives, journals, art spaces, and archives gradually became more collective, strategic, organized, and international. Within this realm, archives became important resources for various activities, including the organization of concept- and mail art projects, as well as for the historicization of avant-garde art.¹² On the one hand, artists documented their own and their colleagues' activities because state institutions ignored, marginalized, and at the same time supervised, inspected, and ridiculed them. Thus, though self-documentation was an essential element of neo-avant-garde art practices worldwide, in Eastern Europe it was also meeting a need, since artists were forced to be their own curators, critics, archivists, and art historians—and to construct alternative accounts and historicizations.¹³ Archives constituted a means to attain relative self-reliance and self-assigned power and for artists to write their own histories. Archives built by Eastern European artists are also counter-collections in the sense that they valued information, systematic knowledge, networks, international integration, and contextualization instead of aiming for commercial value—or to be used as raw material for individual artistic practices. In the last few decades this self-organized network of parallel archives has had to go through different versions of post-socialist transitions in addition to the inevitable transition from the semi-private to the public sphere.

In Artpool's new institutional situation as part of a state museum, it has become crucial to reanimate and strengthen Artpool's transregional network. Therefore, an international conference was organized in 2020 to celebrate the

12 For critical and reflective approaches to parallel cultures and institutions in Eastern Europe, see Reuben Fowkes, ed., "Actually Existing Artworlds of Socialism," special issue, *Third Text* 32, no. 153 (July 2018); Edit Sasvári, Hedvig Turai, Sándor Hornyik, eds., *Art in Hungary 1956–1980: Doublespeak and Beyond* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2018); Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, Zsóka Leposa, and Enikő Róka eds., *1971 – Parallel Nonsynchronism* (Bucharest: Punch; Budapest: tranzit.hu, 2021).

13 Zdenka Badovinac, "Interrupted Histories," in *Prekinjene Zgodovine = Interrupted Histories* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2006).

fortieth anniversary of its founding.¹⁴ This volume grew from selected papers presented at the conference, which aimed to stitch Artpool's specific example into a polyphonic narrative of parallel institutions established in the countries of Eastern Europe. The conference took Artpool's Active Archive concept as a common point of departure and explored its contemporary interpretations, applications, and similarities with and differences from other inspiring archival projects as well as their critical readings. From the wide-ranging pool of approaches presented at the conference, this volume focuses on a turning point that not only Artpool is facing but one that is relevant for many other artist archives and the networks they have created.

This turn is related to yet also distinct from “archive fever” (Jacques Derrida's term) of the 1990s, “archival impulse” (after Hal Foster's 2004 article) of the 2000s, and “performing archives” in relation to contemporary curatorial and artistic practices.¹⁵ Whereas the sociological as well as artistic deconstruction of certain archival principles has revealed the politically determined structures of knowledge production, in the specific context of East Central European regime changes, archives—both self-organized and institutional (including declassified state security archives)—have become fertile grounds for rewriting, correcting, and emancipating, but also for forging, alternative histories. However, as described above in connection with Artpool's Active Archive concept, archives can be approached not only as archeological grounds, as imprints of an era, as passive objects of scientific or artistic research, but also as subjects, as active, self-conscious agents maneuvering through history. Thus the phrase “artist archive” here does not stand for

14 Artpool 40—Active Archives and Art Networks, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, February 20–21, 2020. The conference was organized by Júlia Klaniczay, Emese Kürti, and Zsuzsa László from Artpool Art Research Center—Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest in collaboration with Judit Bodor (University of Dundee) and Beáta Hock (Universität Leipzig).

15 Several publications and articles are available that give an overview of all these discourses and artistic as well as curatorial practices. See, for example, Wolfgang Ernst, *Das Rumoren der Archive: Ordnung aus Unordnung* (Berlin: Merve, 2002); Charles Merewether, ed., *The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art* (London: Whitechapel; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006); Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008); or a succinct summary, including an Eastern European perspective, by Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez: “Archive(s),” in *Atlas of Transformation*, eds. Zbynek Baladran and Vít Havránek (Prague: tranzit.cz; Zürich: JRP Ringier, 2010) 58–59. I refrain from citing a comprehensive bibliography here.

the sheer collection of documentation of an artist's own activities but, much more, for conceptually conceived self-organized and future-oriented systems for archiving, structuring, processing, historicizing, sharing, and circulating documents and information. Their formation is driven by institutional critique but, in the long term, they cannot avoid contact with institutions and turning their initial institutional critique on themselves. Rather than spatial embodiments of memory politics, artist archives are discussed in this volume as both initiators and objects of institutional critique. Travelers in "Möbius time," they cannot remain intact by their own evolving history, but they may pertain their capacity for action and agency through reflecting on their temporality. This book addresses the challenge of continuity, sustainability, and institutionalization of archives established by Eastern European artists, i.e., how they survive and stay authentic in radically changed contexts compared to the ones in which they were established. The authors of the volume, eleven internationally renowned scholars, propose innovative museological, curatorial, academic, and artistic perspectives that can be applied to discuss artist archives and archival practices not as static time capsules but as self-organized institutions actively shaping their own histories and futures.

As an opening to the reader, **Kristine Stiles** shares a Henri Bergson-inspired poetic phenomenology of the archive that materializes time experienced as a fleeting dividing line where future continuously becomes past. She gives a generously personal but conceptually reflective insight into the future-oriented motives and experiences behind her archive, which is now part of the Duke University Libraries. Though based in the US, during her travels to both Western and Eastern Europe, Stiles encountered approaches to archiving that inspired and informed the foundation of her archive, which integrates—in the hope of potential, but still unknown, future relevance—personal and professional correspondence, artists' writings and books, ephemera, and the documents of art events and her own curatorial projects, including several related to Eastern European artistic practices.

The volume then proceeds with conceptual proposals, derived from artistic practices, that have a potential to dislodge a static understanding of archives. **Sven Spieker's** chapter, interpreting the works of Andrea Fraser and John Baldessari from the US, Sándor Altorjai from Hungary, Cornelia Schleime from the DDR, the subREAL group from Romania, and the MAMŪ studio, originally active in Târgu Mureș, Romania, exposes archiving through the necessarily complementary dualism of accumulation and destruction, remembrance and oblivion, transparency and obscurity, structure and dis-

order. Spieker argues that artistic disruption of the order or integrity of archives does not aim at annihilation but is rather a *kulturtechnik* employed to adapt collections of documents into new contexts. He also points out that Eastern European artists taking the liberty not only to aggregate but also to discard and rework documents manifest a desire to be “archive workers rather than archival objects.”

Daniel Grůň also focuses on the interplay between archival and artistic processes in the context of Eastern European art scenes, where artist themselves were historically the main documenters of artistic activities, and thus became their own historiographers. It was characteristic of the Cold War era that actions and exhibitions were often staged just for the sake of documentation, without the possibility to make them public, whereas their records circulated afterward in a wide range of circuits in ever more globalized artistic networks. In his essay, Grůň juxtaposes two projects, one by Stano Filko first realized in cooperation with Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský, and the other by Dóra Maurer. In both cases, artists’ (self-)documentation and archive building were not activities external to their artistic practice but comprised an essential and collaborative part of it, as is more and more recognized by recent art history writing. In the specific cases discussed here, radical reduction and abstraction of the artistic material and individual touch through mechanical transformations can also provide a conceptual framework for the inevitable reorganization and transfiguration of artist archives surviving the era of their foundation.

Artist archives also function as in-between zones of public and private, social and artistic, and historical and fictional spheres, as **David Crowley**’s essay uncovers. Crowley discusses a group of artists and intellectuals active in Moscow in the 1970–80s who researched, documented, and created pseudo-scientific taxonomies of such social phenomena as the rise of religious sects in an atheist society. With a crosstalk between conceptualism and the poetics of “bureaucratic aesthetics,” artists such as Ilya Kabakov, Viktor Pivovarov, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, and the members of the Moscow Conceptualists created catalogs of ritualistic use of ordinary objects. Crowley presents these practices as artistic means to document and create material histories.

Zdenka Badovinac also discusses artist archives as agents of the historicization of ignored and marginalized subjects and voices in specific historical contexts, starting from the regime changes and Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and leading to the repeated migration crises of the 2010s. At the same time, she raises the crucial question of what museums and art institutions can

learn from such self-organized archives and how it is possible to integrate them—while preserving their authenticity—into more rigid and controlled museological systems. Using examples from her own curatorial practice, e.g., the 2006 exhibition *Interrupted Histories* and *The Heritage of 1989* from 2017, Badovinac reflects on the significance of surveillance, interruptions, losses, and absences as constituents of the histories that archives created and processed by Eastern European artists can tell without the spectacularization of repression or misery.

Artistic self-historicization, though an alternative to institutional history, does not necessarily perform all its reflective and critical potentials. **Lina Džuverović** calls attention to the need for the feminist reevaluation of previously unreflected upon gendered subordinations and omissions in the historicization of artist groups formed around progressive ideas of collectivism, and she particularly examines those in the context of Yugoslavia. The feminist revisiting of Eastern European art histories is complicated by the fact that whereas socialist societies ostensibly embraced women's emancipation and equality, latent sexism was present in both state and parallel culture. Comparing authorship as indicated in the catalogs and films of the Slovenian OHO group with art-historical publications and present-day interviews made with the group's members, she deconstructs and uncovers ignored mechanisms of marginalizing female participants.

The chapters that follow unpack case studies of particular Eastern European artist archives that worked out generative solutions to deal with the dilemmas of independence, collaboration, participation, canonization, and institutionalization posed by changing cultural-political contexts in Eastern Europe and beyond. As **Emese Kürti**'s chapter testifies, neither the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio of György Galántai nor Artpool was conceived as a genuinely underground venue. Artpool had to survive in the loopholes of the system but, on some occasions in the 1980s, was able to cooperate with state-run institutions and developed strategies that it can still rely on now as part of a state museum. Kürti dismantles the narrative of the heroic avant-garde and argues that Artpool's ambition, already in the 1980s, went beyond the informal and contingent sphere of the underground and instead aimed to expand, not subvert, the possibilities allowed by a Marxist understanding of culture.

Closest to Artpool's institutional consciousness was the Polish artistic duo KwieKulik's mission to transform their Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation into a state-financed public institution. **Tomasz Załuski** uncovers—as a potential history—systematic but repeatedly failed proposals for-

mulated by KwieKulik for cultural policy makers and thus underscores the contrived nature of historicizing Eastern European art scenes through an oppositional framework of official versus non-official spheres. For KwieKulik's institutional critique, which—similar to that of György Galántai, as explored by Emese Kürti—was not fighting against but for socialist modernization, Zaluski proposes the term *alternative official*. In addition to providing parallels, these case studies shed light onto the particularities of each archive's history. Though the cultural politics of Poland in the 1970s allowed much more optimism regarding the possible neo-avant-garde reform of socialist art and its institutions, in Hungary of the 1990s Artpool was able to open its public venues and ventured to become an independent organization whereas the KwieKulik archive continued negotiations with state institutions for decades and, after many failed attempts, it became part of the Museum of Modern Art Warsaw only recently.

Ewa Partum's Galeria Adres (1972–77) in Łódź also functioned as a tactical institution—first public, then semi-public, and finally underground—that shared information and documents collected through international correspondences fueled by the emerging mail art networks. **Karolina Majewska-Güde** compares the resulting archive of Ewa Partum to that of the Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT. Both archives were established under similar artistic impulses and institutionalized in the 2010s, but after in-depth exploration, they manifest very different organizational principles. The symbiosis between private space, private life, and institutional functioning—also present in the practice of KwieKulik and to a lesser extent in Artpool—gave rise, in the case of Ewa Partum, to an archive still very much attached to the artistic and curatorial practices of the artist, which are intentionally resistant to systematization and spectacularization. At the same time, VALIE EXPORT's archive was able to be converted to a professional research center that, while also representing the artist, is less centered on giving insight into the artist's curatorial, archival, and artistic processes but rather presents her as a public intellectual and as a researcher herself.

Artpool, as well as other artist archives, has also acted as its own historiographer, recycling the documents of earlier projects and inserting them into new constellations. As early as the 1990s, Artpool started to digitize its collection through its website, which, as pointed out in the chapter by **Judit Bodor** and **Roddy Hunter**, did not create a secondary reproduction of the hitherto paper-based archive but, on the contrary, actualized Artpool's "focus on information and data as the currency of exchange." Thus the online presentations

of several Artpool projects are not sheer remediations but are granted a second life and a previously unimaginable accessibility that also poses challenges of maintenance.

We believe the wide range of perspectives in this volume offer applicable insights and methodologies for scholars and practitioners working with or interested in artist archives whose previous interpersonal networks and utopian translocality are now not only driven to adapt to volatile, globalized, and digitalized environments but to proactively interact with them.

Collecting the Future

A Personal History of an Archive

Kristine Stiles

Collecting the future entails maintaining a life suspended in time. As the collector imagines the archive, her voracious accrual of the past persistently mandates attention to the present. She is called upon to assemble and re-view, to sort and catalog, and to fill boxes on shelves, containers that breed ever more additions to the family, appendages piled on and under tables and eventually all over the floor. Once neat, the whole congregation becomes progressively chaotic, an accumulation that simultaneously resembles a massive crime scene and a party in glossolalist chorus. The invited guests, as well as the in-house criminals, consist of things from, about, and to artists, poets, and intellectuals; family, friends, and lovers; colleagues, students, and comrades; acquaintances, enemies, and strangers. These bits and pieces of evidence come in unique and imbricated histories of events, colloquia, lectures, seminars, classes, and discussions, as well as many other sources, and they share curious points of commonality between genealogy and experimental art.

These paper-participant-perpetrators hold the collector hostage for decades, insisting upon her touch and silent reminiscence, even as she hopes to succumb to amnesia, a kind of oblivion needed to cope with and survive the multitude of partial memories called forth by the archive. Throughout the task of endlessly filing and sorting these many things, emotions drift in and out of awareness along with veiled and splintered feelings and sensations sparked by the mere handling of the papers and objects, themselves haunted by the absences stalking her, lack that itself demands recognition as if contact with her hand could erase the dearth of memories. All the while, the documents hold their breath despite incessantly marching toward appreciation. They wait for the precipitous moment when, amidst this mess, one item will take pity on her and arbitrarily reveal its source and history in pristine clarity.

Sometimes, suddenly, without warning or logic, the past springs to life full blown in her conscious musings, arriving from a lone sheet of paper. The rest of the archive looks on, aloof, equivocal, hibernating for another embryonic reckoning. Such is the archive's ethos. Such is the archivist's gratification and misery.

Meanwhile, the papers in the boxes continue to grow over the years, stacking up images, programs, broadsides, letters, notes, emails, faxes, and greeting cards. Some may be valuable, others potentially surfeit. Thousands of inanimate things that once attested to the fullness of her life are gradually accruing lives of their own, waiting to be appreciated for their intrinsic value. As these things savor time, it empowers them. As they grow more confident of their future, they increasingly regard her as a trespasser, an interloper attempting to capture her past in their present future. Even so, and even from the inception of the archive, she anticipated that the scholarly and the curious would come to study, think about, and comment upon her papers, bringing previously inconceivably diverse alternative contexts, meanings, and understandings to them. Together, the papers, pictures, posters, and objects await rebirth in other minds able to offer their own stories about this collection, fresh narratives unencumbered by her. Vaguely, she has always grasped this fate. Accepting her inevitable invisibility, she ignores its emotional and intellectual consequences, and simply carries on the unending process of collecting, even as she edges closer to becoming a mere conduit for the things of her devotion, thereby enabling them to pass into other worlds and enrich other histories.

Finally, the decade, year, and day arrived when a charismatic expert on archives came to review her collection. Admired as an authority on what his renowned institution's library should acquire, he knew that the appraisal of her collection was an implicit evaluation of her judgment and experiences and whether the archive itself was worthy of the library ... or not. She ushered him and his assistant upstairs to *that room* and departed, leaving them to pour through the collection, alert to the possibility that the boxes would present themselves as laudable ... or not. To pass the time while waiting for judgment and to honor her esteemed guests, she brewed Samdayeon Honey Pear Tea, a South Korean delicacy grown on the volcanic southern island of Jeju in the Korea Strait. She had earlier baked sweet cardamom and saffron cookies to celebrate a positive decision, should her archive be acquired, or to sooth a rejection, should nearly a lifetime of hoarding be declined. At last, the two men reappeared downstairs in the sunroom. She gestured graciously

to the chairs next to the tea and cookies, but said nothing. The charming connoisseur opened the conversation: “Do you know how complicated your archive is?” She responded: “I suppose this question means that you do not want it?” Both of them were wrong: she knew and he wanted.

The very next day, a truck arrived, the room emptied, and the archive was whisked away to the world of professional librarians and archivists. Thereafter, when she visited a member of her rowdy clan, she was required to identify the precise number of an inhabitant’s box and request it be sent to the library from its new home in a vast storage warehouse located somewhere in a nearby forest. Once in the library, waiting for reunion with one of her boxes, she would be required to place all of her belongings, except her computer and cell phone, in a locker, don cotton gloves, use only a pencil to take notes, and be supervised while working with files. Upon departure, she would be searched before leaving the building in case she had absconded with a cherished former possession. She has not stolen any of them ... yet.

The room upstairs continues to be repopulated and those items are now periodically deposited into the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University, which now holds the *Kristine Stiles Collection, 1900-[ongoing]*. In what follows, several overlapping themes related to the constitution of this collection are considered: first, how the idea of time (indicated by the title “Collecting the Future”) is useful for thinking about archiving; second, how preserving biographical and genealogical history belongs to a long family tradition; third, how the Hanns Sohm Happening & Fluxus Archive served as a model for “The Sohm Method,” a title coined here to refer to Sohm’s exemplary legacy; and fourth, how Californian and Eastern European artists came to dominate Stiles’ Collection.

“Collecting the Future” refers to an understanding of time derived from Henri Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* (1896). Introducing the term “indivisible limit,” Bergson explained the concept as that “which divides the past from the future” and continued:

When we think this present as going to be, it exists not yet, and when we think it as existing, it is already past. [...] *Practically, we perceive only the past*

[Bergson's emphasis], the pure present being the invisible progress of the past gnawing into the future.¹

Thinking of Bergson's metaphysics of time in the context of collecting, the "indivisible limit" can apply to how time flows through life in interpenetrating evanescent events, some of which may be captured and recorded in the material residue and realities of an archive. In addition, Bergson identified "extensity," or corporeal extension in space, as "like a consciousness" [that] possesses in very truth the indivisibility of our perception; so, inversely, we may without scruple attribute to perception something of the extensity of matter."² Again, Bergson's concept of extensity may be considered as operant in the phenomenology of the archive, in so far as the archive is part of a time continuum simultaneous with corporeal locations, experiences, and memories, all of which constitute the materialization, interpellation, and perception in/of time. Indeed, collecting and archiving is essentially a wager with time past, a gamble on the future, and always already coexistent with the present. This temporal and physical experience is implied in two segments of the American poet Joseph Donahue's *The Secret History of Secrets* (2014):

as if we are always a split second
 ahead of our own thought,
 so that the past is right "there,"
 lived again in the ripple ...
 There's no real way,
 an authority assures me
 to locate an event in time
 or in space. There is only
 before and after, only here
 and there³

Such is the ethos of the archive in addition to its concrete materiality. But let us be absolutely clear: such philosophical and poetic understandings of Bergson's identification of "indivisible limit" and "extensity," as applied to collect-

1 Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), 149–150.

2 Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 219.

3 Joseph Donahue, "The Secret History of Secrets," edited by J. Peter Moore in "Poetry by Joseph Donahue," *Jacket 2* (December 17, 2014): <https://jacket2.org/poems/poetry-joseph-donahue>

ing and the objects of an archive, are stated here for the first time, a consideration that only emerged slowly over decades.

To present this temporal process another way and to convey the dynamism of the archive, the title, “Collecting the Future,” alters the normative phrase, “collecting *for* the future,” which implies a distant relationship to an indeterminant time, while the phrase “collecting *the* future,” stipulates a concrete space in which what is collected already exists. Rather than archiving and conceptualizing a collection for an unknown time, the future may be understood as that which has already arrived to inform a future present in its own time. Living in time as duration and continuity means acknowledging that one disappears as the other enters the now in an attosecond, or one quintillion, or a million trillionth of a second. The archive may also be understood as the materialization of temporal phenomena perpetually passing into and beyond while existing in the present. To wit, the life of the archive represents a psycho-cognitive process in which objects are assembled *as if* the future is *already realized* in and through the very things in one’s hands. “Collecting the future” is based on the conviction that the future is inherent in all that one is and does. The now is the record of that time.

Having begun with an abstruse explanation of time as essential to the archive, a more mundane account is now at hand. Succinctly put, collecting provided a distraction from the present of a challenging childhood in which I willfully absorbed myself in books, research, and papers, intellectual experiences that abetted unconscious emotional repression of repeated traumatic experiences. That said about the past, as the nascent archive unfolded over several decades in the future, it proved a useful way to organize life itself, especially as the histories of those things collected were themselves the residue of direct experience and could be researched and remembered—even if the past remained blocked. Eventually, the idea of an “archive” crept to mind in San Francisco in the late 1970s though numerous overlapping experiences. As a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, Professor Peter Selz was my doctoral advisor, and I worked with him in his archive, carefully observing and learning how he organized his library and personal papers. In addition, as the assistant to artist Bruce Conner for eight years, I gained a pro-

found respect for his organization of files, while failing miserably to acquire his notoriously impeccable critical approach to everything in life. Friendships with many other California artists, especially Peter d'Agostino, Lynn Hershmann Leeson, Mark Thompson, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, and many others, was equally instructive for how they approached documenting their legacies. Researching at that time in the San Francisco Museum of Art's library, I also worked under the watchful eye of the towering figure of Eugenia Candau, SF MoMA's librarian from 1968 to 2001; she was and remains the embodiment of dedication to knowledge and its preservation.

During this period, I also spent a lot of time going to poetry readings, hanging out at the Caffè Trieste, the "poet's café" in North Beach (where I lived at the time), and meeting poets at City Lights Book Store. That is how I began collecting material by poets, and where I befriended Jack Micheline. A flamboyant painter, street poet, and one of the original Beat poets, Jack spent a lot of time at our apartment. He told me that he had left a collection of papers in a barn in upstate New York and, not long after, I flew there and retrieved as much as I could of it. Also, frequent travel abroad on dissertation research, in a still divided Europe, resulted in life-long relationships with many artists and the resulting necessity to preserve the evidence of those friendships and all that they taught. Having rescued some of Jack's papers, and already collecting family materials, I began thinking more systematically about collecting, even though it felt too pretentious at that time to describe such activity as "archiving."

This rich and imbricated history could never have unfolded without the direct impact of, and my mother's respect for, letters. Katherine Haller Rogers Dolan, known as Kitty, acquired the habit from her father, my maternal grandfather,⁴ who learned it from both his mother and his father, who

4 Dr. Frederick Rand Rogers (1894–1972), a radical philosopher-educator, writer, and crusader in the field of physical education and "physical fitness" (a phrase attributed to him), and inventor of the Physical Fitness Index. Grandfather wrote a number of books. *Treason in American Education a Case History* (1949) is a treatise on and history of Stanford University that exposed what he considered the amoral, short-sightedness of science in cynical materialism, anti-religion, and the cult of academic license. See <https://www.readinkbooks.com/product/7785/Treason-in-American-Education-A-Case-History-Rogers-Frederick-Rand>. Eight years earlier he brought out *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique* (1941), auguring his later collaboration with Joseph Pilates on the pamphlet *The Pilates Pamphlet: Return to Life Through Contrology* (1957), and the concept

learned it from his father, and so on into the past.⁵ Archives, per se, were not discussed, but Kitty saved everyone's letters and I adopted her habit even as a young girl.⁶ Without a doubt, however, the twenty-page, single-spaced, typed epistles that our family regularly received from her father, our Grandfather Rogers, impressed me the most. Grandfather wrote to us on many topics, not the least of which was how his only grandchildren should be raised and how we five should behave. We dreaded and treasured his letters.⁷ Kitty also drummed into us how history both undermines and determines everything, a conviction that she enforced with attempts to impress us with our "fine genealogy," a heritage which we were expected to honor and emulate. Thus, did lineage and legacy contribute to archiving.

As if the weight of all these ancestors was not burden enough, Kitty also informed us about both her grandfather Dr. George Spalatin Easterday, Mayor of Albuquerque, New Mexico from 1892 to 1893, and his wife, our reputed great grandmother, Katherine Haller (called Kittie, after whom my mother was named). Kittie's father had struck it rich in the California Gold Rush and she inherited a fortune that enabled her to travel the world alone after the death of Dr. Easterday. She shipped home all manner of fine furniture,

of "contrology" being a way "to develop the physique to high levels of strength and beauty, under the control of the mind."

- 5 Kitty's paternal ancestry included her grandmother Josephine Rand Rogers (1869–1950), a president of The League of Women Voters, and politically active in the Temperance Movement and in passing Child Welfare Laws; her grandfather Frederick J. Rogers (ca. 1860–1945), a professor of physics at Stanford University, and his father, John Rankin Rogers (1838–1901), third Governor of the State of Washington, who, with the State Legislature, instituted the "Barefoot Schoolboy Act," providing a law for state funding to equalize support for free public education.

See: http://apps.leg.wa.gov/oralhistory/timeline_event.aspx?e=10.

Throughout the 1890s, he also authored many essays with populist themes such as "The Rights of Man and The Wrongs of Man," 1893; "Homes for the Homeless," 1895; and "Free Land: The Remedy for Involuntary Poverty [...]," 1897, among many other articles devoted to social injustice.

- 6 When my mother died, I found all of my letters to her since the age of five in a folder with my name, just like the folders she kept for each one of my other four siblings.
- 7 Once when I was twelve, he sequestered me in the living room for a "conversation." It was, in effect, a Socratic model of teaching critical thinking, and began with benign questions like, "Who is your best friend?" followed by endless strings of queries as to why and how and when. We kept this question/answer up for about four hours before I ran out, calling for my mother to "Make him stop!" I heard his response to my mother's entreat: "She's fine. It took." I do credit him for the joy of deliberate reasoning.

prized objects, paintings, and jewelry, which we inherited. For pleasure, she designed and painted Haviland Limoges china with twenty-four karat gold pieces, melted down in her own kiln, and signed on the back with her initials, KHE, using the liquid gold. The plates remain in the family today, as does a box of Kittie's natural blond hair, a length of about thirty inches that never grayed. This memento preserved a Victorian tradition of keeping locks of hair of beloved deceased family members. My sisters and I played with Kittie's hair, winding it into a blond bun on top of our brown-haired heads.

As if this pomp and history was not enough for five children to absorb, early on we were also informed that Kittie was not, in fact, the mother of our mother's mother Beatrice. Kittie, it was said, had been "barren" and her husband, "the good Dr. Easterday," had been a notorious philanderer. As the story goes, after his lover was found pregnant, Dr. Easterday whisked the woman off to St. Louis where she gave birth to Beatrice, who was immediately adopted by Kittie, which is how such "indiscretions" were handled by the powerful then. To this day, the identity of the woman who bore my maternal grandmother is unknown. Wild speculation continues to ensue down through the generations of our family. My own research suggests—with little doubt—that the actual mother of my grandmother was a young married Italian woman, who had recently moved with her husband to Albuquerque from the ancient village of Fornovolasco in the Province of Lucca, Italy. I have a picture of her: she was small and fine-featured like my own tiny, 4'8" grandmother Beatrice. Of this I will write no more, except to add that this mystery contributed to our family's collective fascination with archives—fanciful and real.

Regarding my father's background, little was said. As far as my mother was concerned, his pure Irish lineage was of no consequence: "I married your father," she often told us, "to clean up an overbred gene pool." My father, Paul, countered this rude dismissal with the actual fact that his father had been a wealthy, highly educated Boston church decorator, trained in Italy, and who had won the second bid to renovate St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City. That truth did not quell Kitty's disregard. For me, this information proved to be more evidence to be collected and stored.

We five children could never evade these stories, as our very home constituted an archive of sorts, being full of the trappings of that bygone prosperity: we ate from Kittie's china dishes painted in gold; we played on the gorgeous rugs she sent from the Orient; we sat on her fine carved furniture. We also read from bookcases full of Grandfather Rogers' Harvard Classics, and more. Meanwhile our parents struggled to pay the mortgage, went bankrupt

repeatedly, drank, partied, loved each other intensely, philandered, fought constantly, and finally divorced. I married Mr. Stiles at twenty in 1967, and escaped to California, divorcing five years later. Thus, should it come as no surprise that part of practice of “collecting the future” developed from family annals.

It felt like eons before arriving as a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley in 1974. There my dissertation topic became the “Destruction in Art Symposium (DIAS),” which took place in London throughout September 1966 and to which artists from over fifteen countries sent works or came in person to participate. DIAS included performances, poetry, music, installations, lots of explosives and the arrest of the organizers,⁸ as well as a three-day symposium poised in the middle of the month at which artists spoke and discussed the use of destruction in art. While doing dissertation research on DIAS in April 1978, I ran into the American conceptual and performance artist Tom Marioni on a street in Amsterdam. He had founded the Museum of Conceptual Art (MOCA) in 1970, and the raw, early alternative space brought many national and international artists to San Francisco. Tom greeted me with two sentences that literally changed my life: “Are you going to Vienna for the International Performance Festival? I’m performing there.” Knowing nothing about it, I responded instantly, “YES!” and departed that evening on a student Eurail Pass for Vienna by overnight train.

Arriving next morning, I found a hotel, checked a map for the site of the festival’s main venue in the old university quarter in Vienna’s center, and on my way stopped at the charming Café Diglas for coffee. I did not know at the time that this was one of Vienna’s renowned cafes, founded in 1888. There, also by chance, I met the German artist Ecke Bonk, as we noticed that we were both examining material related to the festival. Bonk (then going by the

8 The organizer, German artist Gustav Metzger, and his co-organizer the Irish poet John Sharkey, were arrested and tried ten months later at The Central Criminal Court of England and Wales, commonly referred to as the Old Bailey, on grounds that they had exhibited an obscene event, performed by members of Wiener Aktionismus, Hermann Nitsch, Otto Mühl, Günter Brus, Peter Weibel, accompanied by the American artist Al Hansen and others.

name Aquinada) was already exhibiting an installation on the staircase of the primary site of the festival, the Contemporary Art Gallery run by the Viennese curator Ursula Krinzinger. We become lifelong friends after witnessing and discussing for days and nights performances by Ulay & Abramović, Charlemagne Palestine, Hermann Nitsch, Laurie Anderson, Stuart Brisley, Simone Forti, Heinz Cibulka, Raša Todosijević, and Marioni, of course, among many others.

When the Festival in Vienna ended and moved on to Yugoslavia, Ecke Bonk and I went too. We drove in his car first to Zagreb, where we saw performances, and then on to Belgrade where we attended all the events at the infamous Belgrade Student Cultural Center (SKC), founded in 1970. The building had previously housed the offices of the Yugoslavian secret service and still retained its aura.⁹ Among the performances I remember to this day were Sanja Iveković's *Party* (fig. 1.1), Raša Todosijević's *Was Ist Kunst*, and especially Jürgen Klauke's *The Harder They Come*. Klauke's poignant action appeared to be a self-critique, as the handsome, elegant, slim, erotic, aloof artist—wearing all white and bedecked in necklaces and rings—walked, ran, and danced to Jimmy Cliff's "The Harder They Come," while stepping through a circular maze of bricks tied with strings. The faster he moved, the more entangled he became in the string, tripping and falling to the floor repeatedly until exhaustion, shattering the invulnerable image he presented.

Where this history dovetails with the topic of collecting is a dinner in a Belgrade restaurant with many of the artists to which Ecke and I were invited by the Serbian art historian and curator, Bojana Pejić. At the end of an exuberant meal with lots of talk and joking, she passed her paper placemat around the table and asked everyone to sign it as a memento of the historic occasion. When the placemat came to me, I started to pass it on, but she stopped me, asking, "Why aren't you signing?" I answered: "I am only a student and no one will remember me." She replied, "You will be remembered. Please sign." I did. Her acknowledgment mattered then and still today, for this experience, together with attending all three venues of the International Performance Festival, contributed to the foundation of my direction as a scholar and a collector. Also, many experiences in Belgrade prompted the beginning of my love affair with Eastern Europe, still divided behind the "Iron Curtain."

9 For an account of how the artists obtained this building, see my essay, "Cloud with Its Shadow," in *Marina Abramović* (London: Phaidon, 2008), 33–94: https://sites.duke.edu/aahvpdf/files/2020/11/Stiles_MarinaAbramovic.pdf

Figure 1.1: Sanja Iveković (center) performing “Party” in the Belgrade Student’s Cultural Center, in 1978 with participation by Bojana Pejić (far right) Ecke Bonk and Kristine Stiles (standing far left).



Photo: Nebojša Čanković. Courtesy of the Arhiva SKC Beograd.

I was captivated by the generations of Eastern European artists' psychic intensity and presentation of the hard truths of life that they conveyed in their work, and I eventually made plans to return.

During these halcyon days, and upon returning to Vienna, I made an appointment to visit the Sohm Archive, then in Sohm's home in Markgröningen, Germany (before it moved to the Stattgalerie in Stuttgart), and there I

learned from the master himself. Hanns Sohm (1921–1999) gave me permission to explore and study every aspect of his archive. He answered endless questions each time I visited between 1978 and 1980. On one visit, Sohm and his wife invited me to live in their home and included me in nightly dinners, during which Sohm regaled us with stories about all the artists he knew. He was especially grateful to Wolf Vostell, who he credited not only with turning his attention to collecting the counterculture of the time, namely happenings and Fluxus, but also with tutoring Sohm on their avant-garde activities and introducing him to new artists. It was also Vostell who encouraged Sohm, along with the Viennese action artists—Hermann Nitsch, Günter Brus, and Otto Mühl—to attend DIAS.

Sohm's systematic retrieval of every scrap of ephemera from DIAS—similar to Pejić collecting signatures on her paper placemat—reinforced for me the significance of these mementos and traces of people and activities. Sohm also took many photographs during DIAS, and his images, along with his documentation and ephemera, contributed to my dissertation's reconstruction of unique details of DIAS, as well as its ethos. Because Sohm was so attentive, not only to every detail but also to the character of artists, studying in his archive and talking to him enabled me to grasp the individual character of the artists at DIAS, which was invaluable when I eventually interviewed most of them. Sohm also conveyed the DIAS artists' intense competitiveness, the macho grandstanding of some, and the vulnerability and sensitivity of others. I've never been clear about why Sohm took me under his tutelage, but I did recognize myself in his voracious curiosity, hunger for knowledge, and stamina to follow though, despite the twenty-six-year difference in our ages. What I admired most in Sohm was his fearlessness, his unselfconscious effort to acquire knowledge, his patience, excellent judge of character, and decisive recognition of opportunists.

All of these aspects of Sohm's approach to the world and to collecting constitute what I fondly identified above as the "Sohm Method," which, in the practical sense of building a focused archive, included the following organizing principles: 1) emphasis on a particular area of art and its histories; 2) comprehensive documentation of all the artists, poets, composers, curators, and any other related individuals involved in that particular focus; 3) collections of artists' and scholars' correspondence and writings on related topics in books, journals, catalogs, magazines (the more obscure the better) and ephemera; 4) collections of related films, videos and relics of actions; and 5) collection of related kinds of artistic activities such as DIAS, which was neither a "hap-

pening” nor “Fluxus” (the titular identification of Sohm’s archive), but which was (and remains) overlapping in substance and practice, along with other named groups such as the Situationist International, Spur, Viennese Actionism, ZERO, concrete music and poetry, and other related materials such as artist’s books and underground literature.

After this extraordinary, unexpected, life-altering research and tutorial in the “Sohm Method,” and after finishing the dissertation and beginning to teach at Duke University, I did return in 1991 to Eastern Europe. On that trip, I drove from Vienna across Hungary and along the northern border of Romania to the area of Bukovina, renowned for its painted churches in the monasteries and towns and villages of Humor, Moldovița, Pătrăuți, Probota, Suceava, Sucevița, and Voroneț, all of which I visited. While in a hotel in the mountains near Suceava, someone put an explosive on the hatchback of my rental car blowing out the windows. This was a dangerous period in Romania only a year and a half after the assassination of the former dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, on Christmas Day 1989. I immediately departed, driving back across Romania in one day. After crossing back into Hungary, I vowed to return, telling my travelling companion that, as the Romanians who put the plastic explosive on the car did not know that I specialized in destruction in art, I took their explosive as an invitation to return.

I returned to Romania six months later in 1992, and went straight to Bucharest where I began research on contemporary Romanian artists. Once again, I had the great good fortune to meet and work with not only Dan and Lia Perjovschi, now life-long friends, but also Ion Bitzan, Ion Grigorescu, and Paul Neagu, among others. On another trip to Eastern Europe, I visited Milan Knížák, Jan Mlčoch, Zorka Ságlová, and Petr Štembera in Prague, among others. My work with all these artists and the materials that I gathered eventually began to fill my archive. I was fortunate to have met them at that time, soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall and before they became too famous, with too little time, to have the kind of deep conversations we enjoyed. What I found in Eastern Europe was a feeling something akin to how the novelist Richard Powers described the survival of trees: “The blackest despair at the heart of them gets pressed to diamond.”¹⁰ That’s how Eastern European artists seemed to me in those years. I, too, was trying to turn my struggle into diamonds in the form of an archive. Hardship had pressed me into living in the future, and I

10 Richard Powers, *The Overstory: A Novel* (W.W. Norton & Company, NY and London: 2018), 6.

identified with Eastern European artists, who, in turn, seemed to grasp those troubled aspects of me. That's how it came to be that they comprise fully a quarter of my archive.

In closing, let me now return to how my archive came to be housed in the Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Duke University, whose mission it is to create "knowledge in service to society." I had been approached by the Getty in Los Angeles regarding the acquisition of my archive, and they sent a librarian to my home in Durham to look at the collection. This person spent several hours going through boxes and reading very personal material. When the woman finally came down stairs, she explained: "The Getty does not acquire the library of anyone who is not an artist but, in your case, because you have been an artist and worked with so many artists, we will acquire your archive and give you a special title." I have forgotten the precise term she suggested, but it was flattering, and I was thrilled that my collection might go to the Getty. Next, she asked me how much money I wanted for the archive. I laughed and replied that I no idea how to evaluate it. But she pressed me for an answer so I replied, smiling, "How about \$500,000!" She said she would get back to me and departed for LA.

After about six months and hearing nothing further, I called her and asked if the Getty was going to acquire my archive. In a curt voice she replied: "The Getty does not acquire art historian's archives, but in your case, we would accept it as a gift." Furious that she had rifled through my archive, especially love letters, and that she had tricked me into putting an arbitrary value on my collection, I responded: "If I am going to gift my archive to any institution, it will be to Duke University, which has supported me all these years." I hung up. The rest is history. I gave my archive as a gift to Duke, asking for only three points in the agreement: 1) that family papers, historical, and archival material remain in the collection; 2) that I continue to be permitted to contribute to the archive as long as I live; and 3) that the library would require users to secure my permission to use the archive until my death. The library agreed and that was that.

"Destroy, She Said"

The Archive between Archivo-Philia and Archivo-Phobia

Sven Spieker

In this article, I will be concerned especially, if not exclusively, with one extreme form for artists to engage with archives, one that may at first glance strike us as very much counter-productive: their destruction. Of course, for good reason, we tend to associate the creation of an archive with an act of positive production—by which I mean the accumulation of records or the preservation of such an accumulation of records—, much as we tend to associate the liberating or emancipating potential of archives with our ability to preserve an obscured history's documents and artefacts and to make these accessible to a broader public. We generally credit archives with an evidentiary or testimonial function, and that function presupposes the material integrity of the *arkheion*, its place of consignment. By contrast, we tend to associate the destruction of archives with vandalism and what in German is called *Geschichtsvergessenheit*, the forgetting or neglect of history and its memory.

In Eastern Europe as much as in, say, Latin America, the archive has become the central trope around which the question of what has been called "forgotten histories"—i.e., histories that were repressed or expunged from the official record during the period of communism—evolves. The Eastern European artist archive—an archive created by or adopted by an artist—here often fulfills functions that official archives cannot or do not want to fulfill, and helps write the history of previously invisible minorities, as is the case for example with Karol Radziszewski's *Queer Archive Institute*, which chronicles gay and lesbian life in Eastern Europe, incorporating an existing archive compiled by a participant in Poland's underground gay scene during the Cold War; or Lia Perjovschi's *Contemporary Art Archive* (CAA), which contrasts the secrecy and closure of Cold War archives with the globally networked knowl-

edge of an archive that sees itself less as a static container of information than as a dynamic process of knowledge formation. In order to fulfill their documenting function, these archives rely on an intact archival substratum—what above I have called its *arkheion*, the Greek term for the building in which an archive is housed, and one that we could also call its medium—so that the traces stored in that archive may remain as legible as possible.

This said, in truth, the (tentative) *destruction* of or in archives—and the very question if an archive can be destroyed, above and beyond the partial or full expunction of its holdings—is as much part of the history of the archive as their positive accumulation. In fact, the archive has always included an element of destruction, since the more or less regulated destruction of records is the prerequisite for the archive's ability to accept new accessions. In nineteenth-century archive theory, the successful creation of what was referred to, with a metaphor common at the time, as a healthy “archive body” or “*Archivkörper*” relied on regulated cycles of accession and destruction, cycles that in their turn bore witness to changing constellations of administration, secrecy, and power.¹ However, such destruction, carefully noted by archivists and hence by no means an instance of a mythological “destruction without a trace,” by and large followed the model of what we might refer to as “constructive (or creative) destruction,” i.e., a type of destruction that results in a renewal of the archive's productivity, rather than in its paralysis or destruction.² For example, in the nineteenth century administrative bureaucracy, the files that circulated in an office or company were given an archival accession number the very moment they were created, signaling their future obsolescence.³ In this way the bureaucracy succinctly mirrored what Sigmund Freud was finding out roughly at the same time: information is touched by its demise, by its withdrawal from active circulation, the very moment it is created; or rather: such withdrawal is the very condition of its creation.⁴ In an archive, documents may accumulate and become opaque, they may even disappear, but there is no regulated mechanism for erasing or “forgetting” such information as expunged, since such erasure or expunging will generally leave behind new

1 Sven Spieker, *The Big Archive: Art from Bureaucracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 20.

2 See Sven Spieker, ed., *Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 17–18.

3 Spieker, *The Big Archive*, 35–49.

4 Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953–1974).

traces, entries in logs or de-accession lists, etc.⁵ In a different context, the semiotician Umberto Eco, in an article tellingly titled "Ars oblivionalis—forget it!," has described what I am referring to here as the impossibility of creating systematic forgetting; the use of signs to forget other signs will only ever result in new signs, neutralizing the desired effect. Instead of aiming at all-out systematic forgetting, Eco suggests, one might adopt a different strategy that would try to think forgetting or destruction not as instances of full erasure—the metaphysical concept of total destruction—but instead as a strategy of *confusion* or *disarray*.⁶

A compelling example for the strategic use of confusion and disorder (rather than physical annihilation) as a means to bring about strategic forgetting in an archive was Andrea Fraser's 1998 intervention in the archives of the Bern Kunsthalle, entitled *Information Room* (1998). Fraser installed the usually inaccessible archives of the Bern Kunsthalle in the gallery, but in such a way that the documents and books whose spines with their titles and call numbers would normally face the visitors were now facing the wall. In this way, visitors were effectively blinded; they could not pre-select what they were pulling from the shelves, eliminating in this way the sway that an archive's meta-architecture, its organizational system of classification, has over its user. As Fraser writes:

5 One of the few theorists to have addressed the problem of destruction in relation to the archive was Jacques Derrida, who devoted his *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) to the possibility, hinted at in Freud's speculations about a *Todestrieb* or death drive in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," that while we generally assume that destruction affects an archive from without, there may also be a destructive, "an-archival" principle, a death drive, within the psychical apparatus itself, destroying in the process any ambition we may have to summon an archive to bear witness. While any notion that such an anarchival drive or force could be or become subject to representation in art is unthinkable—the reason being that this anarchival principle signifies nothing if not the end, the death, of all representation—I would venture to say that artists such as Jean Boltanski or Anselm Kiefer in their work appear to intend to create outlets for such a tendency. We could also mention Ilya Kabakov in this context whose archive-based early installations, including the *The Big Archive* (1993)—routinely end in a space where for no discernible external reason the archive as a concrete, rationally organized space breaks down and disintegrates into random heaps of rubbish.

6 Umberto Eco, "An Ars Oblivionalis—Forget It!" in *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 103, no. 3. (1988), 254–261.

The program I developed for the information room included installing the entire archive and the entire library in the gallery [...]. The trick was that all the books and archive boxes were to be installed with their spines to the wall, so that while visitors would have access to the material, they would not be able to pre-select what they pulled from the shelves.⁷

Fraser does not destroy the archive of the Bern Kunsthalle; she creates a state of entropy that relegates the task of ordering to each individual orderer. To make the archive accessible in its regular format, with the call numbers facing forward, would have tied their disclosure to the format of the archive, its specific mode of presentation and sequencing of records. By concealing that order, Fraser allowed for random combinations of different records that would have been impossible had the original archival order been preserved. As a strategy that allows the archive to continue to exist but that at the same time radically throws it into disarray, Fraser's project introduced destruction into the archive, understood not as metaphysical annihilation but as a strategic form of subversion of a seemingly neutral order and its channeling of information.

What comes to the fore in Fraser's approach to the Bern archive is not the Derridean *anarchive* (the annihilation of the archive) but instead a more constructive approach to destruction, the use of disorder (destruction) to shift the emphasis, in our approach to archives, from universal categories of ordering to a more affect-driven approach that integrates contingency and chance into our traffic with the archive. Taking Fraser's approach to institutional critique as my departure point, rather than focus on destruction alone, I want to locate an artist's attitude towards the archive between what I'm calling *archivo-philia*, on the one hand, and *archivo-phobia* on the other, with both of these attitudes connoting a spectrum for possible affective responses to the archive, ranging from production and construction to all-out destruction. The two poles of my antinomy (*archivo-philia* vs. *archivo-phobia*) are not of course mutually exclusive; an artist may, for example, destroy an archive as part of a performance—a clear instance of *archivo-phobia*—yet at the same time, he or she

7 Andrea Fraser, quoted in Karin Prätorius and Anika Hausmann, "Questions for Andrea Fraser," in *Interarchive: Archivarisches Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld* = *Interarchive: Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Field of Art*, eds. Beatrice von Bismarck, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig (Cologne: König, 2002), 86.

may preserve the remains of that act of destruction, forming another archive (an instance of *archivo-philia*).⁸

Archivo-phobia and *archivo-philia* together mark the point at which artists rethink the archive, treating it not as a static principle within whose orbit they figure as mere passive objects, but adopting towards it a range of *attitudes* that seek to assimilate archival techniques and procedures for artistic work. We could easily create a map of twentieth-century art based on artists' attitudes towards archives and documents: thus, Surrealism with its interest in registering the facts of the unconscious (André Breton even founded his own archive of surrealism) was fundamentally *archivo-philic*, even as it was critical of the archive as an instance of representation; Futurism, on the other hand, was generally *archivo-phobic*, although in the post-1917 Soviet Union, Futurists learnt to reconcile their *archivo-phobia* with institutionalized *archivo-philia*, as several pre-1917 Futurists assumed positions in newly founded Soviet (art) museums; while Dadaism with its disdain for the archive and its concomitant obsession with the preservation of the detritus of everyday life (including its discarded documents) was both *archivo-phobic* and *archivo-philic* at the same time.

Of course, in a very basic sense, all (analogue) archives, to the extent that they choose to preserve certain records over others, involve a (more or less regulated) element of *archivo-phobia*. As I mentioned, in order to make the archive survive, an archivist has to select and expunge records that would otherwise exceed the archive's storage capacities, usually based on a clear mandate for its mission and function, and not without carefully noting the de-accession in all manner of archival lists. In 1970, the recently deceased John Baldessari made a mockery of this procedure when, not least due to space constraints in his studio, he destroyed all of his paintings created between 1953 and 1966, and then proceeded to bake cookies with the ashes. The resulting installation consisted of a bronze plaque that listed the destroyed works' birth and death dates. Baldessari's act of cremation constitutes an active intervention in the idea that an artist biography needs to follow a linear trajectory

8 As such, the opposition between *archivo-philia* and *archivo-phobia* is less an objectifiable, self-contained entity than the outward limit of a graded field of possible responses. In this sense, too, this opposition is not to be conceived as static or unchanging, but as dynamic and changeable. As several of the art practices discussed below hint, such dynamism also works to question or weaken the dichotomy between *archivo-philia* and *archivo-phobia*.

whose outward manifestation is the accumulation, the archive, of material works. By the same token, Baldessari contests the idea that artistic work is confined to the creation of aesthetic objects, replacing the painterly creation of lone masterworks with the multifarious activities of a self-archiving artist for whom accumulation and destruction are less the metaphysical goalposts in the life of an ingenious artist than cultural techniques, *Kulturtechniken*, that respond to practical rather than purely esthetic demands. In this reading, the destruction of the post-auratic work of art, or its archive, is not an act of barbaric sacrilege but responds to necessities and constraints (including space constraints) that are not by definition different from those that operate in the non-art sphere.

In Baldessari's *Cremation* project, the artist's auto-destruction of his archive is not tantamount to total erasure, as parts of the existing archive are used to create a new archive. The all-consuming respect for the archive's rationally founded *arkheion*, its system of classification based on an institutionally founded mission, gives way, in Baldessari's case, to an emphasis on artistic conduct and a radically expanded view of the artist as contesting the chronological logic of his or her own biography that considers every single work part of a linear temporal trajectory. Consider in this context also the case of Hungarian artist Sándor Altorjai who in 1979, the last year of his life, reassembled nearly all of his previously made works into new ones, mixing an archivo-clastic urge to destroy his own archive with a concomitant archivo-philic urge to create new works from the ones that were collected in that archive. (fig.2.1) Unlike John Baldessari, who made a new work out of the ashes of his archive, Altorjai folds his own archivo-clasm into an act of archivo-philic construction that preserved some degree of recognizability for the existing artworks, a procedure György Galántai has described very well when he wrote that "the destruction of his [Altorjai's, S.S.] own works through reuse, and the integration of his old works into new ones are rooted in an approach which, looking at it from the perspective of the past, respects only intellectual values."⁹ While this is no doubt true, the destruction's success also depends on the skill with which Altorjai, much like Baldessari, used a broad variety of quite practical manual techniques to change the aggregate state of his works.

9 György Galántai, "Aleatoric Demontage of Picture Installation? Introduction to the S. A. Pages," in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 245.

Figure 2.1: Sándor Altorjai, "Jet-Powered Coffin, with Blue Leopard, in the Image of a Galloping Rag: To My Family for Christmas, Inspired by Mihály Munkácsy," 1979.



Collage on fiberboard, 210 x 275 cm, Janus Pannonius Museum, Pécs, JPM 83.20.
Courtesy of the Hungarian Látványtár Art Foundation and the Janus Pannonius Museum. Photo: István Füzi.

I am particularly interested in instances where *archivo-phobia* and *archivo-philía* co-exist, challenging the assumption that archival destruction must be thought of as an instantaneous act, and resulting instead in the construction of counter-archives that contest the normative *chrono-logical* regimes that undergird the nexus between archive and state power. A prominent example here is GDR artist Cornelia Schleime, who in 1989 participated in the occupation of the Stasi headquarters in Erfurt and who subsequently worked with select copies of certain pages of her own Stasi file by collaging into them frivolous and provocative photographs of herself that covered up the original typed pages which had chronicled the surveillance of her private life. (fig. 2.2) On the one hand, Schleime is engaged in an act of archival destruction as she interferes in the rigidly observed formal protocol that

Figure 2.2: Cornelia Schleime, "Stasi-Serie," 2/15, 1993.



Silkscreen photograph, 15 pieces, 100 x 70 cm. © Cornelia Schleime.

regulated the construction of these surveillance protocols. By effectively using the existing pages and by turning their absurd pronouncements—"Her apartment is sparsely furnished with furniture that is meant to look modern"—into captions for her own subversive collages, Schleime acknowledges that the destruction or expunging of the Stasi archive is imaginable only as a process of active assimilation and exploration (by turning the archive around,

by making it her own) and not as a process that follows the metaphysical phantasy of a destruction without a trace. Again, Schleime's collages are archivo-philic and archivo-phobic at the same time: if on the one hand they destroy the original Stasi record by obfuscating it at least partially, on other hand, they also create a new record or archive on its basis, a counter-archive that opposes the de-humanizing effects of the official archive with a different kind of production, one that includes Schleime's identity as a woman with her own dreams and phantasies, and one that uses archive technologies such as photography and the typewriter in ways that directly contradict their official de-humanizing function. Crucially, both the destructive and the constructive pole of Schleime's work with her Stasi file amount to *work*, more precisely, her (Schleime's) work, suggesting that it is no longer the archive but the artist's process of working through the archive that assumes center stage. It is here also that we need to locate the (self)-archiving activities of Eastern European artists during the Cold War—from Jiří Kovanda to Tomislav Gotovac—, activities for which construction and production in and of the archive were only two, if fundamental, techniques for becoming archive workers rather than archival objects.

The insight that archivo-philía and archivo-phobia do not exclude each other was fundamental to the aftermath of 1989. The random destruction that accompanied the opening of the Stasi archives in Berlin's Normannenstrasse in 1989 was a clear instance of archivo-phobia based on the realization that the archive was central to state power and control, perhaps even identical with it. This destruction gave way, however, to the realization that in order to document the repression by the GDR's security apparatus and punish those responsible, archivo-phobic rage and archivo-clasm would need to give way to archivo-philic preservation. By the same token, with respect to unofficial art in Eastern Europe, it seems clear that any effort to research the Cold War and chronicle its repressions cannot do purely with the iconoclasm that typically accompanies archivo-phobia, even when the archives in question are those of the former secret police. For example, when György Galántai published the contents of the *Festő* (Painter) dossier online—the extensive documentation by informants and operatives of the Hungarian Secret Police that had chronicled Galántai's and Artpool's activities—this act was among other things an acknowledgment that the history of these art activities, including Artpool's,

cannot be written without these police files.¹⁰ Just as it is impossible to imagine decolonial or post-colonial history without colonialism, so too, it would be foolish to assume that the history of unofficial art in certain parts of Eastern Europe could be written without taking into account the state's surveillance, including its archives, under which (or perhaps better: with which or alongside which) that art developed.

In Eastern Europe, when artists left their countries for the West, this was often an occasion for the destruction of their archives, either through the artists' own agency or at the hands of the state. When Cornelia Schleime left the GDR for West Germany, for example, her entire early work was left in the GDR with friends, but ended up falling into the hands of the police. As a result it disappeared without a trace. By contrast, when the Romanian artist Ioan Bunuș left his country, in September 1982, he burnt part of his archive in the courtyard of his studio in Oradea, an action of which there are no photos. (fig. 2.3) At the same time, the artist sent another part of the same archive, consisting mainly of drawings, to his friend Károly Elekes, the leading figure of the artist group MAMŰ in Târgu Mureș. As Mădălina Brașoveanu reports,

Bunuș wrote to Elekes that he may do anything he wants with his drawings if he, Bunuș, manages to flee to Austria. Then, in late September 1982, Elekes received a postcard from Bunuș, sent from Vienna, and decided to burn all the remaining drawings of his friend. He did so together with his colleagues in the MAMŰ group. They organized an action outside the city, where they built a structure on which they mounted the drawings to be burned, taking the shape of one of Bunuș's drawings. The resulting action and installation are called Memorial Bunuș.¹¹

It is as if once Bunuș's permanent exile was confirmed, the part of him that had still remained in Romania—the remaining half of his archive—could safely be cremated; he ceased to exist in his homeland. At the same time, the delegated, ritualized destruction of Bunuș's archive and its recording by photographs created a monument to Bunuș's disappearance, reminiscent in a sense of Baldessari's transformation of his paintings into cookies, and his careful registration of the destroyed works' days of birth and death.

10 Several reports has been translated to English and are available here: <https://www.galantai.hu/festo/>.

11 Mădălina Brașoveanu, e-mail message to the author, 30 July, 2019. I thank her for this reference to Bunuș.

Figure 2.3: MAMŪ, "Memorial Bunuș," action, Vizeshalmok, Târgu Mureș, 1982.

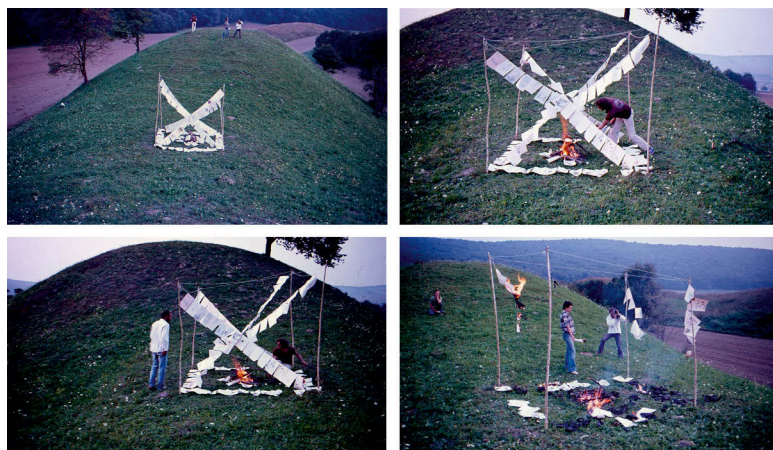


Photo: Károly Elekes. Courtesy of Károly Elekes and Ioan Bunuș.

Photography, in a sense the most quintessential archival medium, is also at the heart of *Deconstruction: Art History Archive* series (1995) by the Romanian artist group subREAL. (fig. 2.4) In 1993, subREAL temporarily assumed custody over an extensive archive of photographs associated with *Arta*, a periodical that between 1953 and 1993 was Romania's only official art magazine and as such a real sourcebook for the history of postwar Romanian art.¹² subREAL used this archive to create lived-in installations they referred to as "decaying data spaces," on account of the fact that the often badly damaged or aged images with which they literally plastered the walls would slowly fall to the floor, creating an increasingly messy environment.¹³ At the same time, the group developed thousands of negatives that were part of the *Arta* collection but that had never been developed because they were considered irrelevant for the ongoing publication process. Unlike the carefully cropped and edited

12 For the discussion of another part of this project see Zdenka Badovinac's chapter in this volume.

13 See Sven Spieker, "SubREAL during the 1990s: Ironic Monuments, Tainted Blood, and Vampiric Realism in a Time of Transition," *ARTMargins Online*, October 7, 2013, <http://artmargins.com/subreal-vampire-realism>.

final images the artists used to paper the archive-studio at Berlin's Künstlerhaus Bethanien, these negatives showed photographic work in progress, and included camera props, the presence of anonymous helpers, and stage sets in the process of being created. By developing and including these negatives, subREAL exceed their role of passive custodians by changing the aggregate state of one part of the collection (the negatives), much as had been the case with Baldessari and Altorjai. Of course, subREAL do not, as the latter two artists did, literally subject the collection entrusted to them to destruction.

Figure 2.4: subREAL, "Deconstruction: Art History Archive series, Lesson 3," installation, Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 1995.



© Călin Dan & Iosif Király.

But by assimilating their archive into their living space and by incorporating into the collection elements that had been excluded from it, they fundamentally altered its aggregate state. In this respect, subREAL's project could be compared to the work of US artists such as Mark Dion who often subverts or "messes up" existing exclusion zones and taxonomies. For example, for his *Schildbach Xylotheque* (2012), which he created for documenta 13, Dion

added six "modern" volumes to an already existing eighteenth-century collection of books made from tree bark. The point was to represent wood from those continents not represented in Schildbach's collection. As in the case of subREAL, Dion appears to suggest that the destruction of archives, much like Eco's *ars oblivionalis*, is difficult to achieve if we think of it as a total annihilation without a trace. As was the case with the other examples discussed in this article, for Dion, to work with an archive as an artist is an active process of assimilation with its own affective charge, a charge that may even include destruction—again, not as a metaphysical or "anarchival" force but as a material media technique, a *Kulturtechnik*.

Active Gaps and Absences in Artist Archives

Stano Filko and Dóra Maurer

Daniel Grůň

The Global Networking of Artist Archives

Over the past twenty years, the hitherto marginal position of the “neo-avant-gardes” in Eastern Europe has conspicuously changed through the globalization of Eastern European art, the work of museums and galleries on the national and international level, and the art market. Today, works by the artists thus categorized are well established in art history and accessible to the public through the collections of private and public institutions. We need to ask for what purposes and for what tasks artist archives are used in the metabolism of contemporary institutional workings, and whether their distinctive mission can be sustained in the dynamically changing spectrum of cultural practices. Currently, many art historians and researchers are highlighting the issues involved in artist archives, presenting both enthusiastic and skeptical points of view.¹ This essay is intended as a contribution to the discussion about an “archival turn,” and questions the role of artist archives as key instruments in the renewal of art history. Since they constitute a source of information about art movements functioning under authoritarian political

1 This paper follows on from my previous research for the book *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Daniel Grůň (Bratislava: Veda, 2020) and summarizes some of the theses introduced in cooperation with the Institute of the Present in Bucharest for an essay collection with the working title *Un-paged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*. The paper results from my current research supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under contract no. APVV-19-0522, titled “Creation and Critique of Values in Contemporary Arts (Visual Arts, Theater, Film).” I would like to express my gratitude to Dóra Halasi, who provided me with digitized catalogs and information on Dóra Maurer’s works located in Artpool Art Research Center.

regimes, artist archives contribute to the canonization and establishment of originally forbidden alternative forms of art. This initiative by artists, often referred to as “self-historicization,”² reveals a variety of creative methods of documentation, careful preservation, diffusion, and foundation of communicative platforms. Frequently, we encounter a critical treatment of the material, economic, institutional, social, and political conditions of creative work precisely among those artists who throughout their working lives were voluntarily or forcibly marginalized, where their information access was limited and communications controlled.

Alongside the globalization of art history in the former Eastern Europe, one can observe a remarkable shift in art history of the recent decade, from the interpretation of artworks or the artist’s career to a reconstruction of the role of artistic initiatives in society and an empowering of transnational and transregional networks.³ The flexible condition of artist archives, accentuated by the institutional interests of museums, by the influence of private capital and commerce, and, furthermore, by initiatives aimed at facilitating access to artist archives and digitalizing them, gives an opportunity for the creation of international research platforms and other means of opening up these resources to the public.

Based on all of this, researchers are frequently making acquaintance with the complicated fates of archives and their founders. Over the course of decades, many such archives have changed their status from private to public or, conversely, they have been lost and it has been necessary to reconstruct them.⁴ The change in the status of artist archives to artworks, created by the artists themselves in their sustained and long-term efforts to present their collections of documentation, leads to an accumulation of symbolic capital to be used for the representation of alternative memory, given that the artists are themselves taking on the researcher’s role as interpreter,

2 Zdenka Badovinac, “Interrupted Histories,” in *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International, 2019), 99. Originally published in: *Prekinjene Zgodovine = Interrupted Histories* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2006), unpagged.

3 Klara Kemp-Welch, *Networking the Bloc: Experimental Art in Eastern Europe, 1965–1981* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 410–12.

4 Katarzyna Cytlak, “Transculturation, Cultural Transfer, and the Colonial Matrix of Power on the Cold War Margins: East European Art Seen from Latin America,” in *Globalizing East European Art Histories, Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (London: Routledge, 2018), 162–74.

historian, and activator.⁵ Together with the change in the status of archives, we need to think freshly through the idea of art as an open communicative platform. As opposed to an art history that foregrounds the idea of art as an aesthetic object, the artist archives challenge us to redefine art as a process that involves a dissolution of the hierarchies between document, archive, art, and social activity to the point where they become interchangeable.

Along with the redefinition of art as a process, an expanded concept of communication is another, highly challenging, legacy of the artists who have given their work in the form of archives. This expanded concept is based on active forms of contact and partnership. It creates alternative spaces as meeting places and initiates relationships between participants wherever the situations play out, and the interaction of all involved subjects establishes a profound sense of community.⁶

The Idea of the “Active Archive” and the Expanded Concept of Communication as Art

When we think about the archive as a medium of art and about art as a medium of archivization, Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest has long been a model example. This archive, constructed over decades, was founded by György Galántai in partnership with Júlia Klaniczay, and together they have conducted it as a communicative space and an instrument for the democratic diffusion of knowledge. The thinking behind this alternative organization is motivated by the artistic aims of György Galántai, who stresses the fact that Artpool’s mission is not only the collection and storage of documentation related to artistic activities: of equal importance is the principle of democratic access to information, anchored in the horizontal approach of the Fluxus movement, founded upon sharing, exchange, and cooperation. “The Active Archive does not merely amass material that is ‘out there’: its mode of func-

5 Tomasz Załuski, “Going through and beyond Artists’ Archives: A Need for Another Archival Turn,” in *Unpaged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*, ed. Alina Șerban (Bucharest: Institute of the Present, forthcoming).

6 Henar Rivière, “The Marginal Codices of Mamablanca and Graciela Gutiérrez Marx’s Inmost Art” in *Unpaged: How to Revisit History from a Plural Perspective*, ed. Alina Șerban (Bucharest: Institute of the Present, forthcoming).

tioning also generates the very material that it has to archive.”⁷ For the concept of an active archive such as Artpool, information has value above all in the relational sense, and the institution keeps itself in constant movement in a variety of forms of interaction. “The Active Archive is a vital institution, which may be interpreted as an organic and open artwork or as an activist kind of artistic practice. Its workplace is the entire world; it works with a precise goal and direction, sensitively detecting changes and adapting itself accordingly.”⁸ Galántai’s theoretical framework of the “active archive” works with the seemingly contradictory ideas of autonomy and cooperation, and represents a dialogic work of institutional art that is uninterruptedly in motion. This model of the institution is distinguished from classical archiving work in that it not only collects documents it regards as experimental art and stores them for the future, but it also acts proactively.⁹

Here I would like to address the question of Galántai’s conception of the active archive in comparison with communicative models of art, and the archive as a medium of art, in selected works by Stano Filko and Dóra Maurer. The work of these two artists is closely connected with the creation of alternative institutional frameworks in the context of the power systems and ideological structures dominating the sphere of art during the period of the communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe. I will try to show that, despite the fundamentally different media employed in the works selected, namely film and painting, both of these artists expand communication (by means other than those which Galántai has used) around a performance-oriented or processually directed artwork, and they redefine the very concept of communication in relation to art. Here I understand the concept of expanded communication in the sense of a connecting of elementary forms, tactile resources, and extra-verbal methods for mutual understanding. In Dóra Maurer’s case, the context of expanded communication was the art course she conducted jointly with Miklós Erdély, and occasionally also György Galántai, in Budapest between 1975 and 1977, in the Cultural Center of the

7 György Galántai, “Active Archive, 1979–2003,” in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, https://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html

8 Galántai, “Active Archive,” 15.

9 Emese Kürti, “Underground Realism: György Galántai’s Institutional Strategies,” in *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-East Europe*, ed. Daniel Grűn (Bratislava: Veda, 2020), 50.

Ganz-MÁVAG engineering works. Maurer, like Erdély, was a member of the Béla Balázs Studio, the unique center of avant-garde film production in state-socialist Hungary which had a direct influence on her film work.¹⁰ Contrastingly, Stano Filko, by entirely different means, first in tandem with fellow artists Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský and later independently, established an open, communicative cosmological system into which he projected the entirety of his art. As the title of this paper suggests, I will deal here with the active role given to the gap, absence, and void by means of white paint and white surfaces, which occupied the thoughts of these artists beyond the basic prerequisites of visual representation.

Measuring the Absence: A Comparison of *White Space in White Space* and *Timing*

In the year 1973 three young Slovak artists, Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, began collaboration on a project that has since gained a legendary, almost mythic status in post-conceptual art. Entitled *White Space in White Space* (*Biely priestor v bielom priestore*), its first instantiation, in 1974, was installed in the Brno House of Arts (Dům umění), where it was not publicly accessible. It was “exhibited” on a Monday, when the gallery was closed to the public, existing only for a few hours between the dismantling of the previous show and the installation of the next.¹¹ This first realization of *White Space in White Space* could therefore only be seen by selected friends of the artists and the organizers of the gallery—a fact that contributed early on to making it a legend (fig. 3.1–2).

Another locus where the project gained momentum (in meetings and private discussions) was the Bratislava apartment of Miloš Laky, which at the time was designed all in white and recycled certain elements of the Brno installation. According to witnesses, most visitors experienced a kind of sensory shock upon entering this peculiar environment. However, with its enigmatic

10 Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, and Franciska Zólyom, “Introduction,” in *Creativity Exercises: Emancipatory Pedagogies in Art and Beyond* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020), 12.

11 The first part of this text section was published in the introduction to the book and further elaborated on in my essay “Notes of a Belated Viewer,” in *White Space in White Space / Biely priestor v bielom priestore: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, Ján Zavarský 1973–1982*, eds. Daniel Grúň, Christian Höller, Kathrin Rhomberg (Vienna: Schölebrügge Editor, Kontakt Collection, 2021), 31–38.

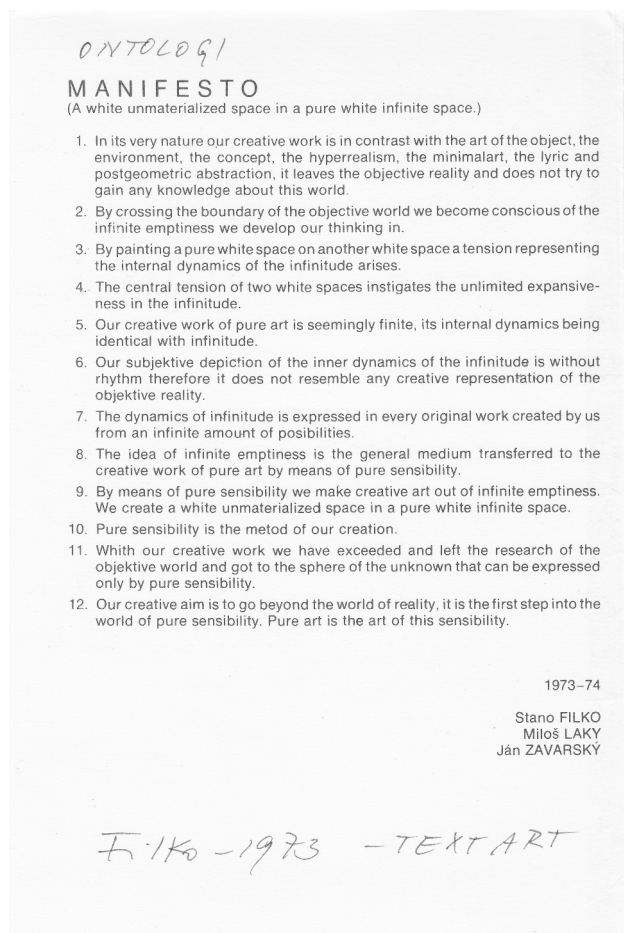
Figure 3.1–2: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, “White Space in White Space,” House of Arts Brno, 1974.



Photo: Štefan Tamáš. Courtesy of the Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava.

history of origin and its manifestation in odd places such as Laky's apartment, the *White Space in White Space* project soon gained a reputation as a focal work of the Eastern European neo-avant-garde. The artists themselves started to nurture this reputation by compiling a small catalog, based on carefully prepared documentation of the project's first realization in Brno; they then

Figure 3.3: Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavorský, "White Space in White Space—Manifesto," 1973–1974, self-published catalog of the exhibition in House of Arts, Brno.



distributed this through the postal network, which enabled them to gain attention internationally. The self-published catalog took the form of a folder, which included their *Manifesto (White Non-material Space in a Pure White Infinite Space)*, photographic documentation of the exhibition, and an accompanying

essay by the curator Jiří Valoch. The manifesto, signed jointly by Filko, Laky, and Zavarský, is an independent artistic text, hence it is neither a description nor an explanation of the artistic realization of the spatial installation. An explicit polemic against contemporary avant-garde modernism is launched in the *Manifesto* (fig. 3.3). A crucial point is entry no. 9, where the authors declare: "Via pure sensibility we are creating an infinite void."¹² Alongside the manifesto, the project was later accompanied by a number of noteworthy texts published in catalogs, magazines, and samizdat literature. The contributing authors were important representatives of Czech, Slovak, Polish, Hungarian, and Yugoslavian art criticism, including Jiří Valoch, Tomáš Štrauss, László Beke, Grzegorz Sztabiński, and Ješa Denegri. Reading their texts makes it perfectly clear that *White Space in White Space* was not accepted in an unambiguously positive spirit and indeed provoked plenty of controversy.

Explorations of the philosophical, poetic, and spiritual associations of white monochrome painting culminated in international art in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Even though there are obvious links to monochrome painting, such as the use of non-color, unconventional formats, and materials and techniques not commonly associated with painting, it would nonetheless not be adequate to interpret the work of the three Slovak artists solely from the perspective either of the Western art canon or of Eastern European art.

In his essay Jiří Valoch points out that the painting with white paint is performed by anonymous mechanical means, using a roller, thereby excluding any individual signature. Apart from that, the method of applying the paint to the surfaces with a mechanically rotating cylinder fulfils another of the artists' aims: to underline the potential infinity of the impressed surface, where the individual realizations are only fragmentary records of a surface that is boundless. It will not escape the perceptive reader of Valoch's text that, instead of the concept of an artistic "collective," he uses the designation "team."¹³ Communist collectivism was ideologically loaded and widely abused in official propaganda; the artists were therefore, on the one hand, attempting to update the collectivism of the radical interwar avant-garde and, on the other hand, evoking the work of international scientific cooperation

12 Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, and Ján Zavarský, *Biely priestor v bielom priestore* = *White Space in White Space* = *Un Espace Blanc dans l'Espace Blanc* = *Weiser Raum in Weisen Raum* 1973–74 (Brno: Dům umění, 1974), unpagued.

13 Jiří Valoch, "Untitled (White Space in White Space)," in Filko, Laky, and Zavarský, *Biely priestor v bielom priestore*, unpagued.

projects. Collective work, where an individual signature does not play a role, redefines the very concept of authorship by painterly means. Valoch also states that collective work has no constructive but only a speculative character. This statement needs to be clarified. The layering of paint, applied by a roller to strips of fabric or hollow tubing, generates tension, which (according to the second point of the manifesto) represents the inner dynamic of the infinite. Valoch avails himself of the term “metaspace,” which he understands as a means of describing an infinite space. Since a real space between the layers of paint does not actually exist, this involves a fictive concept of, or approach to, space. “I cannot demonstrate metaspace, but I can work in space in such a way that the viewer approaches its purpose or identifies with it.”¹⁴ Valoch understands that the individual presentations are above all a demonstration of possibilities—not, however, an enclosed whole with its own binding ethical rules and pre-established significance. And it is precisely on this point that certain essential differences become apparent when *White Space in White Space* is compared to the works of interwar constructivism, or to similarly radical solutions in the postwar period (Robert Rauschenberg, Piero Manzoni, Yves Klein, Ad Reinhard, etc.). According to Valoch, the speculative system practiced by the team of artists represents the very opposite of a closed whole; the individual artefacts therefore represent the creation of various possibilities of concretizing this system and, at the same time, also their process of inspection and documentation. Here we arrive at the core of what is at issue, namely a performative creation, which the artists designated as a “demonstration.”

White Space in White Space produced a “space” that gradually changed over time (almost a decade). In a certain sense, one might speak of a processual and performative dimension of a surface unfolded infinitely in coherent, individual stages: *Sensibility* (1973–74), *Sensitivity* (1974–76), *Emotion* (1977), and *Transcendence* (1978) (the final two stages being executed by Stano Filko independently). The paradox here resides in the contradiction between disciplined presentation, the automation of creative work, and pure sensibility as a method of creation, via which “an infinite void is artistically expressed.”¹⁵ The automation of artistic execution, directed by a disciplined repetition of white strips of paint on diverse bases, does not lead to the production of identical results but rather to incessant variability, difference, and deviations, all

14 Jiří Valoch, “Untitled,” unpagued.

15 Jiří Valoch, “Untitled,” unpagued.

of which being programmatically employed in the scenic composition within the gallery's white cube space.

During preparations for an exhibition at the Club of Young Artists in Budapest in April 1977, Ján Zavarský made contact with Dóra Maurer, who helped to arrange the publication of a catalog for the exhibition.¹⁶ Earlier, in 1973, the same year Filko, Laky, and Zavarský's project was initiated, Maurer began working on the ideas for a 16 mm black-and-white silent film, entitled *Timing*, which she finally completed in 1980. The time span of the film's production corresponds to the period when the project of the three Slovak artists took shape. Both works emerged in parallel, drawing upon different sources and responding to the different conditions of cultural practice in Hungary and Czechoslovakia. This notwithstanding, both works engendered cooperation (Dóra Maurer cooperated with the cameramen János Gulyás and Károly Stocker) and stimulated analytical thoughts on the time-space qualities of the media of depiction, namely painting, film, and photography. In a catalog published on the occasion of an exhibition in Pécs of her collected films, Dóra Maurer characterized her artistic approach as follows:

Time is measured by folding a piece of white linen in front of a black background: I fold it altogether seven times, one fold more each time, always starting anew. The proportions of the cloth correspond to the [projected] picture size of a 16 mm film, its length is that of my two outstretched arms. It is not only the object of folding/transformations, since its projected picture is (at gallery shows the film is projected on the piece of linen that was used in the action) both a picture and the "carrier of the picture" at the same time. It shrinks and almost disappears in the process, while structuring and determining the time of the film.

Four variations were made: The film described above was the first. In the second, a mask was placed before the objective to halve the picture. Rewinding the negative in the camera to the beginning, the process was recorded twice: first through the left, then through the right mask hole. In the third and fourth variations, the mask was divided into four and eight, resp. The

16 Stano Filko, Miloš Laky and Ján Zavarský, *Senzitivita / Sensitivité / Sensitiven / Sensitivity 1974–1975–1976* (Budapest: Fiatal Művészek Klubja [Club of Young Artists], 1977). Artists' self-published catalog with a manifesto by the artists and theoretical texts by Jiří Valoch, Tomáš Štraus, László Beke. The exhibition itself was open from April 29 to May 5, 1977.

system of folding, the constant divisions of the mask, interfered with and often swallowed up the image.¹⁷

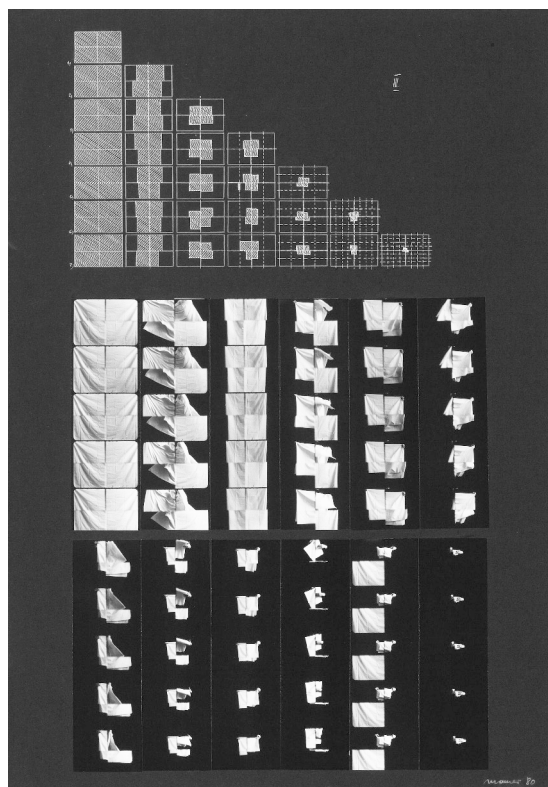
While Filko, Laky, and Zavorský apply, to areas of varying extent, white synthetic paint to the surfaces of a linen canvas in relation to the proportions and folding of the material, Maurer uses the proportion of the canvas in relation to the measure and span of her outspread arms. Maurer gives visibility to (women's) work by the performative action of folding, and thus one of the stereotypes of the patriarchal division of labor (care of the household and folding of linen) makes its way into the subtext of the work.¹⁸ In contrast to the open set of variable horizontal and vertical canvases of the installation *White Space in White Space*, Maurer lays emphasis on the geometrically constructive analogy between the folding of the canvas and the division of the film image using the mask of the camera lens: first on two, then on four, and finally on eight fields. A further structural analogy between the folding and the (modernist) grid is emphasized by Maurer in her black-and-white contact prints entitled *Timing—Analyses I–IV* (1980). In four phases the artist arranged beneath her a geometrical sketch of a graduated folding in regular fields, with the division of fields by a grid expressing the process of folding. The system of the grid is repeated in a regular arrangement of the photographic records of folding. The folds of the white canvas come to the forefront through being folded, thanks to the scene being shot against a black background, where the figure of the black-clothed performer is lost, so that along with the canvas we perceive only the gestural language of palms grasping the folded canvas. (fig. 3.4)

László Beke has pointed to the importance of the work *Timing* in Dóra Maurer's artistic practice, emphasizing the analogy between the screen and the projection of the film image on the one hand and the folding of the canvas and measuring of the pictorial field on the other:

17 Dóra Maurer, *Filmek = Films 1973–83* (Pécs: Pécsi Galéria, 1983), 7.

18 Although Dóra Maurer resists straight connections to feminism, Beáta Hock has found traces of the artist's interest in 1970's feminist art. However, Maurer was a mediator between international and domestic art. She was living partly in Vienna during the 1970s and also transmitted contemporary feminist ideas to fellow Hungarian artists. Beáta Hock, *Gendered Artistic Positions and Social Voices: Politics, Cinema and the Visual Arts in State-Socialist and Post-Socialist Hungary* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2013), 191–3.

Figure 3.4: Dóra Maurer, “Timing—Analyses I–IV,” 1980.



Photographs from the negative strip of *Timing* mounted on cardboard, 100 x 70 cm. © Dóra Maurer. Courtesy of the Vintage Gallery.

But we must not forget that this canvas is the same size of the cinema screen, and the metaphor “the canvas of the painter = the canvas of the filmmaker” is particularly emphasized by the fact that while folding the canvas, the screen is also dividing itself: into two, into four, into eight... FOLDING becomes a special case of MEASURING [...]. The cinema-like specialty of *Timing*, how-

ever, was given by the fact that this way she measured space and (film-)time at the same time.¹⁹

Both in Maurer's and in Filko, Laky, and Zavarský's projects, a key element is the gradation of the surface in space and time: as against the regular numerical gradation in *Timing*, the gradation of *White Space in White Space* is accomplished from the center to the sides, with the areas of the individual strips of white paint on the canvas contracting or narrowing. While for *White Space in White Space* photos of the installations, together with the accompanying manifestos and other texts, were included in the method of distribution and subsequent archiving of the work, the contact prints of *Timing—Analyses I–IV* serve rather to photographically record, explain, and clarify Maurer's working procedure. There is a basic difference between the two works to this extent: the first tends toward both an unpredictable pictorial area and an intuitive resolution of its limitlessness; the second concentrates on the predictability of the geometrical composition of the pictorial area. While Filko, Laky, and Zavarský elaborated the analogy between the conceptual declaration in the text of the manifestos and the unbounded pictorial surface in the exhibition space, Dóra Maurer established an analogy between the pictorial surface of the folded canvas and the projection of the film image. In the first case, the graduated transcription of the initiatory idea, and the varied phases of its demonstration by painterly means, laid the basis for its further reinterpretation by Stano Filko in the active form of his personal archive. This archive is today an integral part of the spectral holistic system created by the artist in the early 1980s, composed of three categories, corresponding to three degrees of being, which Filko named (1) red—biology; (2) blue—cosmology; (3) white—absolute spirituality and would later elaborate further (fig. 3.5–6).²⁰

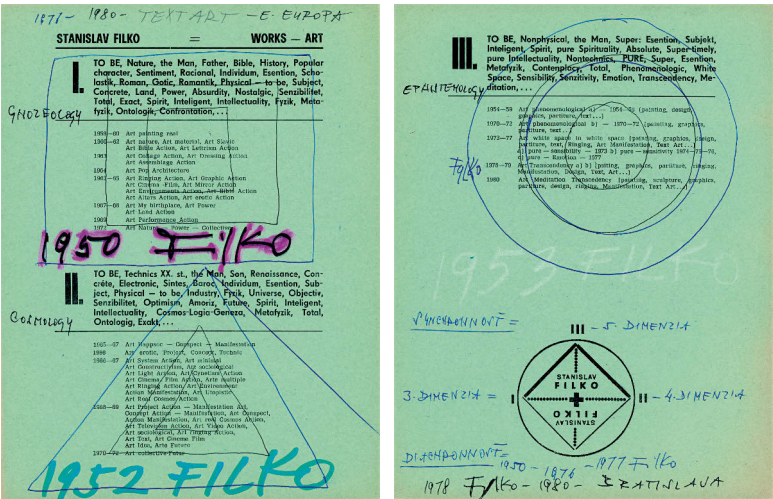
Dóra Maurer's *Timing*, by contrast, takes the position of a nodal point, because it integrates the important motive forces that are essential to her work. The film stands at the crossroads of all the endeavors the artist had thus far undertaken.²¹ Indeed, the film's organizing principle is contained in the mea-

19 László Beke, "Objective Tenderness," in *Dóra Maurer: Arbeiten = Munkák = Works 1970–1993*, eds. Dieter Ronte, László Beke (Budapest: Present Time Foundation, 1994), 107–8.

20 Aurel Hrabušický, "Stano Filko—tvorba 1964–1980," in *Stano Filko 1*, eds. Lucia Gregorová Stach, Aurel Hrabušický (Bratislava: Slovenská národná galéria, 2018), 341–342. The editors use the terms "Filko's cosmology" and "psycho-philosophical system SF."

21 László Beke, "Objective Tenderness," 107–8.

Figure 3.5–6: Stano Filko, “Works—Art,” 1980, self-published leaflet.



asuring of the compositional make-up of the pictorial surface as a time axis of the events of folding. The organizing principle in *Timing* is based on a transposition of the canvas to the projective surface of the film and a displacement of the counting of the foldings of the canvas to the film cutting location. Gábor Kaszás writes on this principle in his essay on the collaboration between Dóra Maurer and her partner, Tibor Gáyor:

The displacement is always visually present—joining the initial and final states—in her works, with which she transposes the created visual phenomena into purely qualitative and quantitative variables. Maurer’s works based on the permutation and interchange of the elements of displacement and dislocation thus, with their vocabulary and their structure, also result in shifts in their visual sense. The revelation of the essential message of the mutating artwork-structure, pointing beyond itself, meanwhile relies upon the creativity and imagination of the recipient in every instance.²²

22 Gábor Kaszás, “An Artist Couple: Dóra Maurer—Tibor Gáyor: The Outline of Two Artistic Careers,” in *Maurer—Gáyor: Párhuzamos Életművek = Parallele Lebenswerke = Parallele Oeuvres* (Győr: Városi Művészeti Múzeum, 2002), 83.

Maurer's media-specific interventions amplify this displacement effect in her structural approach to the film image: "This not only brings the approximate sameness of the repetitions to light, but also reveals the many inextricably related deviations and anomalies inherent in the impression of constant sameness."²³ Behind shifting the meaning of measuring the time to measuring the absence, there are precisely these deviations and anomalies present in gaps between regular folding of the canvas. In other words, the film measures subjective time rather than clock time.²⁴

Maurer's film might be compared (though not directly) to her teaching work at the Cultural Center of the Ganz-MÁVAG engineering works. According to Éva Forgács, Maurer's emphasis on a visual education in elementary forms and processes of perception comes from the spirit and methodology of Bauhaus:

Maurer composed a systematic teaching process to drive her students away from copying into freely conceived re-creation of a visual experience. [...] Taking a fresh look at the simplest forms leads to re-considering fundamental concepts; and reassessing basic concepts of forms opens up the road to reconsider other views, beyond visual expression. This prospect was the actual purpose of introducing the study circles' participants into visual literacy and lucid, systematic thinking.²⁵

In an essay on her teaching work during that period, Maurer emphasizes the moment of concentration and cleansing of the space from all disturbing influences; collectively, she and the course participants painted all of the furniture and equipment white.²⁶ The concept of expanded communication was developed still further by her coworker Miklós Erdély, who placed communication at the center of his artistic and teaching theory, as the communication of a specific enlightened state of mind.²⁷

23 Christian Höller, "Displacement Effects," in *Maurer Dóra: Hajlított idő—Filmretrospektív = Folded Time—Film Retrospective*, ed. Zoltán Prosek (Budapest: Rómer Flóris Művészeti és Történelmi Múzeum / Flóris Rómer Museum of Art and History, 2018), 67.

24 Judit Király, "Timing, 1973 (1980)," in Prosek, *Maurer Dóra*, 84–5.

25 Éva Forgács, "The Bauhaus Paradox: Creativity, Freedom and the Long-Lasting Legacy of Bauhaus in Hungary," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 213.

26 Dóra Maurer, "Outline of an Essay on Visual Education, 1978," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 111.

27 Sándor Hornyik, "Creativity, Collaboration and Enlightenment: Miklós Erdély's Art Pedagogy," in Hegyi, László, and Zólyom, *Creativity Exercises*, 186.

Discontinuities, Absences, Gaps, and Artist Archives

What the two projects examined here have in common is the absence of an object of depiction and a resistance to the spectacle. Both are fully focused on a performative self-referential process. But gaps and absences also occur on the level of successive order of images, whether it is photographic documentation of the *White Space in White Space* installation or the film *Timing* (elements of displacement and dislocation forming vocabulary and structure of the work as discussed above). From this comparison, can we deduce something about the organizing principle of the archive? Sven Spieker claims that archives are less concerned with memory than with the necessity to discard, erase, and eliminate.²⁸ According to Spieker, analysis of archives requires resisting a linear narrative, which means to treat gaps or absences as functional elements in the analytical process.²⁹ Postsocialist artist archives could be the kind of places that materialize discontinuities, absences, and gaps in narratives on the transformation of Eastern Europe's former socialist societies. Their significance consists in self-historicization and self-contextualization,³⁰ because artistic and archival practice have combined in a method of constructing statements whose purposes are realized independently of established institutional practice and give visibility to extruded levels of social reality.

We may define the artist archive as an organizing structure that is, in principle, non-discursive and non-narrative, whose inner temporality is fully bound up with the material and method of archivization. As the critical theory of postcommunism, overlapping with thinking on decolonization, has demonstrated, the archive as a medium of artistic practice may be an active

28 Cited from Wolfgang Ernst, "Discontinuities: Does the Archive Become Metaphorical in Multimedia Space?," in *Digital Memory and the Archive*, ed. Jussi Parikka (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 113.

29 Sven Spieker, "The Big Archive," in *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, eds. Ana Janevski, Roxana Marcoci, and Ksenia Nouril (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018), 151–3.

30 Here I would like to indicate a parallel with the concept of "a living archive of the diaspora" outlined by Stuart Hall: "The moment of the archive represents the end of a certain kind of creative innocence, and the beginning of a new stage of self-consciousness, of self-reflexivity in an artistic movement. Here the whole apparatus of 'a history'—periods, key figures and works, tendencies, shifts, breaks, ruptures—slips silently into place." Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15, no. 54 (Spring 2001), 89.

source of communicative memory (of the gaps, absences, and extruded and suppressed places, in public and collective memory) encompassing three periods of historical experience: actually existing socialism; the revolutions and fall of socialist regimes; and, finally, the postcommunist transition to capitalism.³¹

As the archives demonstrate new methodological procedures for the archaeology of media, this may then (provided our reading of them is freed from a reductive subordination to the discourse of (art) historiography) lead to an acknowledgement of the archive as an agent with a “tempo-reality” all its own.³² Such a methodology, on the one hand, points to the resistance of artist archives to historical time and may be productive in disclosing a system of arranging documents as a construction that inherently has an essential testimonial value. On the other hand, every archive is connected to a complex sequence of historical events, on the level of personal episode as well as on that of political action. In the case of the archives of Eastern European artists, which have been distinguished by contra- or para-institutional concepts, what is important is not only their subversive aspect, undermining the state’s totalitarian power of direction during the times of real socialism; equally significant is their resistance to reductive views of the socialist past.

31 Ovidiu Țichindeleanu, “Decolonizing Eastern Europe: Beyond Internal Critique,” in Janevski, Marcoci, and Nouril, *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe*, 194.

32 Wolfgang Ernst, “Radically De-Historicising the Archiv Decolonising Archival Memory from the Supremacy of Historical Discourse,” *L’Internationale Online*, February 2, 2016, https://www.internationaleonline.org/research/decolonising_practices/50_radically_de_historicising_the_archive_decolonising_archival_memory_from_the_supremacy_of_historical_discourse/.

The New Sectarianism

A Manual for Art

David Crowley

In 1985 the Institute of Atheism in Moscow published a report into the various religious communities and beliefs that had taken root in the Soviet Union since the 1960s. How, it asked, could new forms of spirituality emerge in a society organized by the reifying force of Marxist-Leninism? Why were new religions continuing to emerge after the instruments to advance atheism had been put in place? A classified document, *New Sectarianism* (*Novoe sektanstvo*) was an anthology of materials that the Institute's researchers had gathered since the late 1970s. They had taken what they called "religious expeditions"—conducting interviews, tracking samizdat documents—and, from these activities, they fashioned an archive of the "New Sects" of the USSR.

New Sectarianism did not address the atavistic belief systems still persisting in the remotest fringes of the Union itself. Instead, the primary interest of the Institute's researchers was in the new religious feeling of the scientific-technical and artistic-literary intelligentsia largely living in Soviet cities. The manual's editor, Professor Raisa Omarovna Gibaydulina, was interested in non-traditional, non-organized forms of religion, hypothesizing that there was a kind of metaphysical surplus in the Soviet Union which persisted despite the militant atheism of official ideology. Troublingly, the diverse faces of new "religiosity" were, in fact, adaptations to or, perhaps, products of distinctly Soviet conditions: some of these sects emerged within intelligentsia professions—physicists who attributed special meaning to light, or philologists who saw divine meaning in particular words. These new sects were notably literary too: they sought to outline and test their beliefs in words—written privately or in samizdat, or in their professional lives—and they left textual traces which the Institute's researchers collected. The manual describes a

kind of expanding world, with sects dividing and forming, often without any kind of organizational cohesion.

One of the researchers' tasks was to create a taxonomy for the many faces of the new sectarianism. Gibaydulina's team identified various categories including "sects of everyday life," "doomsday cults," ultra-conformists, those who venerated atheism or philistinism, and others who discovered mystical and religious values in official culture such as the "Pushkinites" who treated the great Russian poet as a messiah. Each category was further sub-divided into sects: the sects of the everyday included "food worshippers" who sanctified food but treated hunger as higher condition: "domesticians" who, perceiving crisis in the world, transformed their homes into "all-comprehensive" systems of life and waited for a future utopia in which all civilization would take on domestic forms; and "matterists" who stood against official Soviet doctrines of materialism by worshipping the humble things in the world and rejected "semicracy"—the hegemony of signs—in favor of the undervalued sense of touch.

Gibaydulina admitted uncertainty in naming these cults. Partly, because it was difficult to distinguish between what might be a matter of faith and what might be a cultish in-joke, or perhaps even a parody. The new sectarians had the habit of sanctifying everyday things and experiences while mocking sanctity itself. In "The Sacrament of Laughter," a document cited in *New Sectarism*, an author known by the initials VN writes:

Religion as an object is parodied, so that the Subject of religion itself may reveal itself. The sermon is parodied so that the Subject of the sermon may itself be expressed [...]. For false seriousness is killed by parody, false subjectivity by citation.

In other words, the new sectarians relished the polysemy of words, a flicker effect switching between plain and metaphorical meanings.

In fact, this was a kind of admission. *New Sectarism* was a fiction ... of sorts. It was the creative invention of the Russian writer and philosopher Mikhail Epstein and had been published after the collapse of the Soviet Union, first in Russian in 1993 in the USA, and in Russia in 1994.¹ He had been working on the manuscript since 1985, and the ideas it contained earlier. In fact,

¹ *Novoe sektantstvo: tipy religiozno-filosofskikh umonastroenii v Rossii (70–80 gody XX Veka)* [New sectarianism: The varieties of religious-philosophical consciousness in Russia in the 1970–80s] (Holyoke: New England, 1993; Moscow: Labirint, 1994). Epstein's book

Epstein himself had undertaken what might be called “religious expeditions” for Moscow State University in the mid-1980s. And in 1982 he had written an essay on “Minimal Religion”:

Minimal religion is a “poor religion.” Its name conjures up a state of religiosity that elicits pity or sympathy or the expression of condolences. It begins from zero and has apparently no tradition. Its “goD” is one of (be)coming, of the second or last coming, which will pass ultimate judgement on the world. The atheistic spelling of the word “goD” with a small initial letter is preserved, but the last letter of the word is, written in uppercase. GoD is perceived as not the “alpha” but the “omega” of the historical process.²

Poor religion was defined as a sense of unworldly religiosity without temples, without doctrines and without priests. It was a concept which he grafted from Jerzy Grotowski’s ideas of Poor Theatre, a kind of direct theatre with minimum props, without lighting effects, without music. Epstein was less interested in credos or rituals than with the persistence and morphology of faith in a society which declared mass atheism—and, as such, he was exploring a psychological phenomenon or in his words “an internal impulse, a state of spirit or a disposition of mind.”³ He called this “post-atheistic spirituality”:

Minimal religion addresses itself to the ironies and paradoxes of Revelation, in which everything that is revealed is at the same time concealed. This is evident even in the early prophecy of Isaiah on the future appearance of the Messiah: “He shall not cry, not list up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street” (Isaiah, 42:2). “[H]e hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire ... [A]nd we hid as it were our faces from him” (Isaiah, 53:2–3). This from the very beginning, the atheistic stage ... is (pre)inscribed in our perception of the Messiah. Post-atheism accepts this “disappearance” of God but interprets it as a sign of His authenticity rather than evidence of His absence.

was translated and issued in English as *Cries in the New Wilderness: From the Files of the Moscow Institute of Atheism* (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2002).

2 Mikhail Epstein, “Minimal Religion” in *Russian Postmodernism: New Perspectives on Post-Soviet Culture*, eds. Mikhail Epstein, Alexander Genis, and Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover (Oxford: Berghahn, 1999), 228–9.

3 Epstein, “Minimal,” 229.

New Sectarianism was the culmination of Epstein's long-standing interest. Moreover, the idea of "Revelation, in which everything that is revealed is at the same time concealed" and the concept of "post-atheistic spirituality" exemplified his intellectual method. (He was then concerned with advancing ideas about Soviet and post-Soviet postmodernism). Typically, in his writing, he rejected antinomies which organized the world as opposites—science and religion; fact and fiction and so on. Instead, his thinking was far more binomial, looking for "and" rather than "or" or finding, for instance, metaphysics in materiality.

In this sense (and in others), *New Sectarianism*—Epstein's parafiction—was fashioned from materials which might be declared as facts. In its identification of attitudes and activities, the reader is tempted to put faces to names: might the "defectors" cult also known as "garbagemen," an apocalyptic sect who anticipate the end of time and "bow down before filth, stooping before the load of human dirt"⁴ be Leningrad's punky Necrorealist filmmakers gathered around the Yevgeny Yufit? Could "The Man Who Never Threw Anything Away," featured in Ilya Kabakov's 1988 celebrated installation *10 Characters*, also be a fellow member of the cult?

Moreover, *New Sectarianism* ventriloquized Soviet authority. Moscow, for instance, had been home to the Institute of Scientific Atheism, a branch of the Academy of Social Sciences. It had been formed at the end of Khrushchev's anti-religious campaign (1958–64). It conducted research into religious attitudes, treating religion as a kind of sociological matter; and coordinated the activities of more than fifty local Houses of Scientific Atheism; and published a popular magazine to promote secular rituals in Soviet society (state-administered weddings, naming ceremonies and funerals).⁵ Following a characteristic pattern in Soviet life, the chief publication promoting atheism, *Nauka i religija* [Science and religion], launched in 1959, provided resources for those curious about the illicit subject of faith. "For many Soviet readers" writes Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "*Nauka i religija* was the only place where they encountered sacred texts, and readers were known to cut and save excerpts from the journal's pages."⁶ Religiosity, esoteric thinking and occult practices grew

4 *Novoe sektantstvo*, 133.

5 See Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space Is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

6 Victoria Smolkin-Rothrock, "The Ticket to the Soviet Soul: Science, Religion, and the Spiritual Crisis of Late Soviet Atheism" *The Russian Review* 73, no. 2 (April 2014): 196.

in Soviet society in the 1970s, becoming “open” interests during the Glasnost period.⁷ They penetrated many of the most Soviet settings: Boris Rauschenbach, the engineer behind the docking technology in the Salyut space stations was also the author of a book on Russian icons; and they even found their way into the Kremlin with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev reportedly turning to faith healer, Eugenia Davitashvili.

Spirituality was an important if still largely unstudied theme of Soviet art too, at least in the 1970s. Sometimes this took the form of a direct engagement with the Orthodox church: Dmitri Plavinsky, an abstract painter who was denied the privileges which followed from membership of the official Union of Artists made pilgrimages to northern towns including Novgorod and Pskov to witness churches and monasteries in their ruined state “to represent the terrible conditions of religion in the Soviet Union” (and yet he was also suspicious of organized religion, viewing the orthodox priests as informants⁸). With their thick surfaces and rough textures, his paintings from the 1960s and 1970s of desiccated medieval frescos and distressed manuscripts, seem to measure decay. In Leningrad, Mikhail Chemiakin, and art historian Vladimir Ivanov, an expert on icons, were the authors of the manifesto of “Metaphysical Synthetism” at the end of the 1960s (published in Paris in 1974) a pantheistic view which saw common ground in all religions and different artistic traditions. In this, they presented themselves as the vanguard of a new spiritual enlightenment which had absorbed the lessons of psychoanalytical thought and modernist abstraction and other novelties:

In the twentieth century the birth of a new type of creative consciousness is taking place: those processes which earlier played in the subconsciousness and the superconscious regions of the soul are now—thanks to the power of the “I”—boldly introduced into the realm of the conscious. The artist is no longer a holy fool. He is a creator, a friend of God. The degree to which he

7 See Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, *The Occult in Russian and Soviet Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1997), 29.

8 “Interview with Dmitri Plavinsky” in Matthew Baigell and Renee Baigell, eds., *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews After Perestroika* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 186.

is permeated by Christ's impulse determines the degree of consciousness in his work.⁹

Convulsing past and present, the Petersburg Group, as Chemiakin and his colleagues anointed themselves, declared themselves to be the new icon painters of the day.

Others declared a kind of loose and non-doctrinal spirituality as the basis of art. Asked, in the late 1970s, what kind of spiritual system to which he subscribed, founder of Collective Actions (discussed below) Andrei Monastyrsky replied: "I think that it is ecumenical—in the broad sense of the word. This is prayer in the language of symbols, one comprehensible to us. Poetics is playing a purely provocative role (the provocation of the sacrosanct)."¹⁰ In other words, engaging the life of the spirit broadcast a kind of indifference to the priorities set by power. This set of testimonies might be much extended, but only to do little more than reinforce the point of the pervasive sense of religiosity in non-conformist culture in the Soviet Union in the Brezhnev years.

New Sectarianism—a text with a pseudonymous author, anthologizing works from a fictional archive and purporting to be the output of an institution—might well be claimed as undeclared and late work of Moscow Conceptualism, the creation of a small but dynamic network of artists and writers that formed in the Soviet capital in the late 1970s (sometimes called Moscow Communal Conceptualism to stress their interconnections¹¹). It shares, for instance, their interest in the "Bureaucratic Aesthetics" of the archive and of the document. By this, I do not mean the economic, depersonalized and "desacralized" characteristics identified by art historian Benjamin Buchloh as typical of much Western Conceptualism that he called the "aesthetic of administration."¹² Writing of artists like Sol LeWitt, he claimed that "what Conceptual Art achieved at least temporarily, however, was to subject

9 Mikhail Shemyakin [Chemiakin] and Vladimir Ivanov, "Metaphysical Synthetism: Programme of the Petersburg Group," 1974, reproduced in Igor Golomshtok and Aleksandr Glezer, eds., *Soviet Art in Exile* (New York: Random House, 1977), 157.

10 Monastyrsky interviewed by Tupitsyn in the late 1970s in Margarita Tupitsyn, "On some Sources of Soviet Conceptualism," in Alla Rosenfeld and Norton T. Dodge, eds., *Nonconformist Art: The Soviet Experience* (London: Thames and Hudson), 317.

11 Victor Tupitsyn, *The Museological Unconscious: Communal (Post)Modernism in Russia* (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 101.

12 Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetic of Administration to the Critique of Institutions," *October* 55 (Winter 1990), 105-43.

the last residues of artistic aspiration toward transcendence (by means of traditional studio skills and privileged modes of experience) to the rigorous and relentless order of the vernacular of administration.”¹³ By contrast, the Moscow Conceptualists discovered lyrical, poetic or absurd dimensions in the report, in the filing system, in the catalog, in the public notice. One of Ilya Kabakov’s early texts from 1982 (and published in *A-YA* in 1984) records his discovery of transcendental qualities in “notices, slips, menus, bills, tickets.” With wry humor, he writes of “The nothingness of the white sheet [...] acts to negate all, it is absolute emptiness, the repudiation of life and its opposite.”¹⁴ This order of high metaphysics transforms a telephone bill into something divine or a work of Suprematist art. Kabakov also divined an existential dimension in the record, in the document, in the files. Here, in switching from otherworldly to the mundane, was a concise illustration of the flicker effect which ran throughout Epstein’s Manual.

And, of course, as many have noted, Kabakov’s works from the late Soviet period have a kind of pathetic quality. In his painting *Taking out the Garbage Can* (1980) (fig. 4.1) recording a rotation of domestic chores in a collective apartment, Kabakov reproduces the kind of panel which guarded hallways and corridors of offices and homes throughout the Soviet Union ready to instruct citizens with correct behavior. Approximating type or copperplate script but rendered by hand, the notice lacked the kind of menacing authority which Soviet power once possessed, as Alla Rosenfeld has noted.¹⁵ Soviet power, once so forceful, was now wielded by the janitor or the secretary of the housing committee.

The self-archiving, self-surveilling practices of the Collective Actions group—in which Kabakov occasionally played a part—also displayed “bureaucratic aesthetics” too. Their early activities—known as “Journeys to the Countryside”—followed a general pattern: twenty or thirty participants would be invited by telephone to leave the city by an appointed train. On arrival, they would walk to a remote field to be presented with a modest intervention into the landscape. In *Appearance* (1976), the first of these actions, the group were

13 Buchloh, “Conceptual,” 142.

14 Ilya Kabakov, “Dissertation on the cognition of the three layers, three levels into which an ordinary, anonymous written product—notice, slips, menus, bills, tickets, etc.—may be broken down,” *A-YA* 6 (1984), 31.

15 Alla Rosenfeld, “Word and/as Image: Visual Experiments of Soviet Nonconformist Artists,” in *Moscow Conceptualism in Context* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2011), 188.

Figure 4.1: Ilya Kabakov, “Расписание выноса помойного ведра” [Taking Out the Garbage Can], 1980.

За чистоту!		Расписание выноса помойного ведра по дому № 24 подъезд № 6 улица п.п. Бардина ЖЭК № 8 Бауманского р-на.									
1979 г.	Анатолий Федоров	Март Андрей	Май Иван	Илья Абисит	Олегович Виктор	Виктор Викторов					
	Виктор И.И. № 15	Анатолий Е.С. № 20	Анатолий Е.С. № 25	Анатолий Е.С. № 30	Анатолий Е.С. № 35	Анатолий Е.С. № 40	Анатолий Е.С. № 45	Анатолий Е.С. № 50	Анатолий Е.С. № 55	Анатолий Е.С. № 60	Анатолий Е.С. № 65
	Виктор И.И. № 15	Анатолий Е.С. № 20	Анатолий Е.С. № 25	Анатолий Е.С. № 30	Анатолий Е.С. № 35	Анатолий Е.С. № 40	Анатолий Е.С. № 45	Анатолий Е.С. № 50	Анатолий Е.С. № 55	Анатолий Е.С. № 60	Анатолий Е.С. № 65
	Виктор И.И. № 15	Анатолий Е.С. № 20	Анатолий Е.С. № 25	Анатолий Е.С. № 30	Анатолий Е.С. № 35	Анатолий Е.С. № 40	Анатолий Е.С. № 45	Анатолий Е.С. № 50	Анатолий Е.С. № 55	Анатолий Е.С. № 60	Анатолий Е.С. № 65
	Виктор И.И. № 15	Анатолий Е.С. № 20	Анатолий Е.С. № 25	Анатолий Е.С. № 30	Анатолий Е.С. № 35	Анатолий Е.С. № 40	Анатолий Е.С. № 45	Анатолий Е.С. № 50	Анатолий Е.С. № 55	Анатолий Е.С. № 60	Анатолий Е.С. № 65
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	Виктор И.И. № 15	Анатолий Е.С. № 20	Анатолий Е.С. № 25	Анатолий Е.С. № 30	Анатолий Е.С. № 35	Анатолий Е.С. № 40	Анатолий Е.С. № 45	Анатолий Е.С. № 50	Анатолий Е.С. № 55	Анатолий Е.С. № 60	Анатолий Е.С. № 65
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Enamel on wood, 152 x 216.3 cm. Emanuel Hoffmann Foundation, on permanent loan to the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel. Photo: Bisig & Bayer, Basel. Courtesy of the Laurenz Foundation.

met by two men who distributed plain cards with the following inscription, “Documentary confirmation that _____ was a witness of Appearance which occurred on March 13th, 1976.” Later actions were more elaborate, although just as “empty.” On returning to Moscow, the participants would write an account of what they had witnessed. The action itself and these reports would form the basis of further discussion by the group. In acting as “informants” recording the activities of their friends, and in Monastyrsky’s systematic “factographic” documentation of the participants in the events with photographs and diagrams, Collective Actions mirrored the actions of the Soviet state. As Cristina Vatulescu points out in her 2010 book, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, after the terror of the Stalin years, the fictions about counter-revolutionary activities in secret police files declined whilst the reach of the state’s surveillance methods expanded and voluminous reports of suspects going about their—often banal—everyday

activities grew.¹⁶ Artists were surveilled by a unit from the fifth division of the KGB tasked with watching out for internal dissent. A consciousness of the potential of being monitored or recorded by the state hung over the lives and the imaginations of Soviet artists and writers. Painter Gleb Bogomolov dryly recalled in the early 1990s—"I would say that they were mostly bored with us but at the same time we were fascinated [with] them."¹⁷ Viewed in these terms, Collective Actions not only re-enacted the techniques of the state surveillance but also the banality (or, put another way, the ideological emptiness) of its archives.

Epstein was close—in personal and intellectual terms—to Moscow Conceptualists in the 1980s.¹⁸ And one can detect close affinities between his writings and the art and writing of Kabakov and that of others including Viktor Pivovarov. In the *New Sectarianism*, one of the most vividly drawn cults are the Matterists who:

Believe that in paradise all souls overcome their "sign-like" duality and acquire the pure being of a thing, which signifies nothing but itself [...] They conduct rituals of sanctifying the tiniest things, such as grains of sand and hand-made spoons, because these items are as unique as God, are patient to all suffering, and are responsive to any need. According to matterism, a man must follow the path of things for they reveal the silent and humble wisdom of being.¹⁹

Pivovarov's *How to Picture the Life of a Soul?*, a 1975 painting (fig. 4.2), seems to be concerned with similar themes. Sixteen ordinary domestic objects are presented in a grid below the words "I can draw" in tidy letters, as if on a page in a schoolbook. Here, the title / question is purposefully ambiguous: is it that objects have souls? or do they constitute material for the task of illuminating the inner life of another person?

Pivovarov, a Moscow artist and illustrator who left the Soviet Union in 1982, was the author of a number of paintings in the 1970s that, in toto, he saw

16 Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*, (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), chapter 1.

17 "Interview with Gleb Bogomolov" in Baigell and Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists*, 139.

18 See his "The Philosophical Implications of Russian Conceptualism," *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2010), 71.

19 *Novoe sektantstvo*, 173.

Figure 4.2: Viktor Pivovarov, "Как изобразить жизнь души?"
[How to Picture the Life of a Soul?], 1975.



Gouache and ink on paper, 43.0 x 30.8 cm. Nancy and Norton Dodge collection, Zimmerly Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA. Courtesy of the artist.

as "a single unitary structure." Featuring tables, taxonomies and lists with letter forms which approximate public notices, these serial works share the taste for "bureaucratic aesthetics" evident in Moscow conceptualism. Melancholic, they were often funny. They were also autobiographical too: in 1984 Pivovarov

wrote: “I was born and raised in a poor room. It is my beginning, my roots, my homeland. I imbibed it with all its impoverished objects along with my mother’s milk ... I draw this room and it is both the world in which I live and my inner self-portrait.”²⁰ Perhaps the best known of his works from his Soviet years are the *Design of Objects for a Lonely Person* series (1975). It starts with a *Design for a Living Space for a Lonely Person*, a floor plan of a thirty-two square meter apartment with a “view of the sky”; the second image presents the possessions required for this home, each accompanied by a matter-of-fact description; the third presents the changing view of the heavens from the window; and the fourth charts his predictable daily routines on the face of a twenty-four-hour clock. Even his dreams can be cataloged, the theme of the fifth image in the sequence. Finally, Pivovarov presents—in words—the biography of the lonely man: only after “university, military service, minor venereal disease, marriage, adultery of a wife, divorce, second marriage, having a lonely child, adultery of the second wife, divorce, an attempt to emigrate, acquisition of living space,” is the lonely person ready to take possession of their new home and the “conscious loneliness” it promises. This “design” is presented as steps on the path to spiritual enlightenment and the joyful loneliness of the hermit, albeit one that reverses the disavowal of private possessions that is central to many mysticisms: “the projects presented [in the series] should help reach the fourth state of loneliness, that though coinciding with the physical death of the person, nonetheless brings true freedom and connects to the infinite.”

Like many of his friends in Moscow art circles, Pivovarov had been drawn to spiritual matters in the 1970s, forming a close relation to the philosopher, filmmaker and theologian Evgeny Shiffers, before eventually pulling back from Shiffers’s attempts to convert him to the Orthodox faith.²¹ This distance is evident in his gently ironic approach to post-atheistic spirituality. In The *Sacralizators* series of watercolors of 1979, each image features a portrait of a man and is captioned above with a title which describes a mundane event or circumstance in everyday life. Absurd but rendered flatly, each deadpan character appears to be „wearing” unremarkable objects of everyday or domestic life on his face and head. In *No. 7, Sacralizator for watching television programs* the young man appears to have prepared for his journey by tying a sausage to the top of his head and a gherkin behind his ear. His nose is encased in a

20 Viktor Pivovarov’s untitled text in *A-Ya 6* (1984), 21.

21 Viktor Pivovarov, *The Agent in Love* (Moscow: Artguide Editions, 2019), 110.

Figure 4.3: Viktor Pivovarov, “10 листов из альбома ‘Сакрализаторы’: Сакратизаторы Симфонического Концерта” [No. 10: *Sacralizator for a symphony concert*], 1979.



Watercolour, pencil, ink on paper, 30 x 24 cm. Nancy and Norton Dodge collection, Zimmerly Art Museum, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, USA. Courtesy of the artist.

roll of toilet paper. In No. 10, *Sacralizator for a symphony concert*, the subject has fixed a plate of sliced cakes to his head from which a teacup and saucer are suspended on fine strings (fig. 4.3). Whether masks or prosthetics (a watch, for instance, for an eye in another *Sacralizator*, or a light bulb for a nose), these mundane objects are The *Sacralizators* which gives the series its name. Protecting their users from any evil that might occur in daily life, they are

both Soviet commodities and fetishes, albeit in ways that predate Marx's conjoining of the latter term. The word fetish—as it was used by Marx—derives from Portuguese *feitiço*, meaning something like witchcraft. Portuguese traders operating along the coast of West Africa during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries called the amulets or devices protecting against ill fortune or bad spirits worn by the people they encountered *fetisso*. In the Western tradition, the attachment to the fetish marked an irrational hold of things on their owners and a way of claiming a progressive and superior attitude. Marx's writing on the Commodity Fetish belongs to that tradition: "In attributing the notion of the fetish to the commodity," writes Peter Stallybrass, "Marx ridiculed a society that thought it had surpassed the 'mere' worship of objects supposedly characteristic of 'Primitive Religions.'"²² Here, these Soviet fetishes return to work their "magic" in an advanced, progressive society.

The idea that things might be *active agents*—a matter of faith for Epstein's "matterists" and the theme of Pivovarov's gentle satire—runs through other Soviet art works of this period. In the *Catalogue of Super Objects—Super Comfort for Super People* portfolio of 1976, Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, for instance, presented thirty-six prostheses that alter the relation of their wearer to the sensible world. "CHAROG-15," a metal grill worn over the face, performs the following functions:

Protect the purity of your thoughts:
 Incantations and curses hold no fear for the CHAROG owner.
 CHAROG: Real security against mass hypnosis and demagoguery.
 Thin, gold-plated strings lock the vices of the surrounding world behind a grill and project your individuality from coarse assaults.
 The top of the CHAROG is carved from black wood and can be used as a head-piece completing this original veil.
 Through CHAROG you can look to the future with Assurance.

Another, "Ksushna," is a device for heightening awareness, took the form of a kind of antenna worn on the forehead:

An Amplifier of the Sixth Sense:
 Put the sensual world of matter behind you.

22 Peter Stallybrass, "Marx's Coat" in Patricia Spyer, ed., *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* (London: Routledge, 1988), 186.

Use Ksushna to link up with the irrational senses of the Individual Ideal.
 As the happy owner of Ksushna, you will be seized and overcome by tensions
 inexpressible in human language.
 A light bronze diadem crowned with an antenna of chrome steel.
 Threads uniting consciousness with the supersensual world are made from
 Natural Chinese silk.

Drawing on the noisy hyperbole of commodity aesthetics but also the lofty values attached to citizenship in the USSR, Komar and Melamid's objects might be read as anti-Soviet satire (characteristic of the Sots-Art movement that the artists pioneered). There is much humor in Komar and Melamid's Super Objects, as there is in Pivovarov's Sacralizators, but they are not *merely* expressions of dark irony or absurdity. Here, Epstein's words—expressed through the proxy of "The Sacrament of Laughter," a document cited in *New Sectarianism*—act as a reminder: "Religion as an object is parodied, so that the Subject of religion itself may reveal itself." There is a kind of pathos in the Super Objects and the Sacralizators in which ordinary things are asked to bear the incalculable "weight" of metaphysics. These artworks point to a "humanthingness" which Epstein identified in human relations with ordinary, anonymous things. "Thingness," he declared, "derives its 'head' from humans, while acting in turn as an extended human 'body.' Wherever there is a thing, there is also a special exit for a human being beyond his body: to nature or art, space or thought, activity or quiet, contemplation or creativity."²³

23 Mikhail Epstein, "Thing and Word: On the Lyrical Museum," in Mikhail Epstein, *After the Future: The Paradoxes of Postmodernism and Contemporary Russian Culture* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 253–89.

Self-Historicization

Artist Archives in Eastern Europe

Zdenka Badovinac

My paper reflects on the specificity of the archives kept by some Eastern European artists, and on the impact that artist archives have on changing the understanding of the process of historicizing, and consequently, on the museum itself.

I will explain this by following my own practice, specifically, through certain exhibitions I put on in Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, that contributed to the historicization of Eastern European art and, more narrowly, the historicization of the common cultural space of former Yugoslavia.

In 2006, I curated the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition,¹ which placed a great deal of importance on artist archives.

One of the things that intrigued me was how artist archives impacted the processes of historicizing. Pioneering work in this realm was done in Poland by the KwieKulik duo, that is Zofia Kulik and Przemysław Kwiek, and in Hungary by György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay. Starting in the early 1970s, KwieKulik collected documents relating to what was then “unofficial” art, art schools, examples of censorship, and similar. Also starting in the 1970s, György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay developed the concept of the “active archive” by staging exhibitions and collecting records of and materials on conceptual art, mail art, visual poetry, kinetic art, land art, actionism, and happenings. According to Galántai, the concept of the active archive “generates the very ma-

1 The catalog of the exhibition: Zdenka Badovinac and Tamara Soban, eds., *Prekinjene zgodovine: Arteast razstava = Interrupted Histories: Arteast Exhibition* (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2006).

terial to be archived”² through calls for participation, co-operation, exchange, and building of non-hierarchical networks, as well as through combining art historical and artistic methodologies of research. An active archive is future-oriented and employs a dynamic approach to history as an open artwork and as activist artistic practice.” Artpool, as their active archive is called, has recently become the constituent for the Central European Research Institute of Art History at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. (fig. 5.1)

Figure 5.1: “Interrupted Histories,” Arteast 2000+ exhibition (Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2006) with the documentation of Artpool’s “Hungary Can Be Yours–International Hungary” project from 1984 in the foreground and of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio in the background.



Photo: Moderna galerija.

2 György Galántai, “Active Archive, 1979–2003,” in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, http://artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

Figure 5.2: Vadim Zakharov, “The Archive of Pastor,” 1992–2001 at “Interrupted Histories,” Arteast 2000+ exhibition, Moderna galerija, Ljubljana, 2006.



Photo: Moderna galerija.

I also invited Romanian artist Lia Perjovschi to participate in the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition; she has been building her Contemporary Art Archive / Center for Art Analysis in Romania since 1985.³ In addition to presenting this material on Romanian art she has also collected information on Western art that entered Romania during that time. For our exhibition, she arranged documentary material on a table in small plastic bags, suggestive of evidence collected during a police investigation. In this way she compared herself to a detective sifting through these materials and documents looking for meaning, for hidden and lost ideas, works, and artists.

Also in the exhibition was the archive of the Slovene group IRWIN that began developing its *East Art Map* project in 2003.⁴ Its purpose is to connect artists from all over Eastern Europe into a unified scheme that exists alongside their national belongings. As part of this project, IRWIN produced an

3 Lia Perjovschi: *Contemporary Art Archive / Center for Art Analysis 1985–2007*, ed. Marius Babias and Sabine Hentzsch (Cluj: Idea; Cologne: König, 2007).

4 *East Art Map: Contemporary Art and Eastern Europe*, ed. Irwin (London: Afterall, 2006).

interactive online project presenting fifty years of Eastern European art history, an exhibition of Eastern European art from 1950 to 1970, a symposium, and an extensive publication.

In an installation in the shape of a documents binder, Russian artist Vadim Zakharov presented his video archive of the exhibitions of Moscow Conceptualism staged outside Russia. (fig. 5.2)

All the artist archives in the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition were displayed as art installations; that is, as both objects of history and its tools at the same time—tools for self-historicization and thus self-contextualization of one's work, without, however, the ambition to produce a counter-narrative. Rather, the aim was to create tension between major and minor, and official and unofficial histories; tension created by informal histories interrupting the formal ones. I described interruption as one of the most important forces of history.

In the frame of this exhibition I adopted two terms that I still find important for my practice today: these are *historicization* and *self-historicization*.

Historicization

Historicization is, to a large extent, associated with that which is just now arriving in history, as is the case, for example, with the history of Eastern European art. That which is just now arriving in history, however, is not merely a new knowledge that is included in the existing system; rather, it is something that necessarily transforms this system. Historicization, then, is based on heterogeneous histories, which are being simultaneously supplemented and interrupted. Historicization creates knowledge that is constantly interrupting itself. One of the aims of historicization is to oppose the single master narrative of history.

Self-Historicization

Self-historicization is an informal system of historicization practiced by artists who, due to the absence of any suitable collective history, are themselves compelled to search for their own historical/interpretive context. Because the local institutions in the non-Western world that should have systematized neo-avant-garde art either did not exist or took a dismissive attitude towards such art, the artists themselves, in various places, were

compelled to archive documents related to their own art, the art of other artists, and broader art movements and conditions of production. Today, in the work of younger artists, the strategy of historicization is acquiring new forms, associated especially with a critique of new relations in society that are attempting to instrumentalize history. If, until recently, the subject of historicization was mainly post-war avant-garde art, then today—in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, for instance—these subjects also include the cultural legacy of socialism and the Yugoslav Partisan movement.

These terms later became part of the local discourse related to similar institutional or artistic practices. One of the most fascinating projects of this kind is the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive formed by Rok Vevar, a writer on the contemporary scenic arts theory and history and a contemporary dance historian and archivist. (fig. 5.3)

Figure 5.3: The Temporary Slovenian Dance Archives with Rok Vevar in the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova in Ljubljana, 2018.



Photo: Moderna galerija.

In 2012, Rok Vevar established the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive in his apartment in Ljubljana, where people could access the material two days a week or by appointment. In his self-interview in *Maska* magazine he

describes it as a sort of personal activist initiative. It is exactly this *personal activist* position that I define as self-historicization. It originated from a simple need and passion to historicize the past and the recent creative dynamics in Slovene non-governmental field of (performing) arts which first helped him to understand and then serve something bigger than himself.

I wanted to see what happened, how, where and why things unfolded, developed, got abandoned, changed and had an effect. I wanted to break out of the vice of fragmentary oral “memoristics”—the collections of anecdotes, inaccurate speculations, and tabloid chitchat commonly prevalent in local environments. [...] Another reason was my realization that there was no institutional database for contemporary performing arts, and contemporary dance in particular, which would enable various applications of collected archival data; not only in Slovenia but in the entire region of the so-called Western Balkans. While this may be normal for cultural contexts even outside of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and other Eastern European countries, the reasons for this deficit may differ greatly from country to country. Thirdly, the TSDA is my attempt at outlining a specific artistic community and its creativity, which I value and see as unique and a fundamentally formative force of my life.⁵

This led Moderna galerija to invite, in March 2018, the TSDA to the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, where Rok Vevar has been performing a living archive-in-progress since then. We have given him one of the exhibition rooms, furnishing it with cabinets, shelves and a desk. Vevar is there every Friday during the opening hours of the museum, available to the users of his archive and visitors to the museum, in a way “exhibited” there alongside his archive. We have signed an agreement with him, stipulating that Moderna galerija provides the TSDA with space for keeping archival material, help and collaboration in carrying out a discursive program, public events, promotional activities, photographing and digitizing, and also technical support, furnishings, and office supplies. The duties of the TSDA as stipulated in the agreement consist of professional care for and processing of the archival material and promotion of the use of said material for research and study purposes. Rok Vevar is further in charge of the concept of the design of the space and collaborates in promoting the archive by giving guided tours. He is free to

5 Rok Vevar, “Waste Management: Self-Interview on the Temporary Slovenian Dance Archive,” *Maska* 30, no. 172–74 (Autumn 2015): 101.

remove the archive at any time, should he so wish. Vevar still hopes that a Contemporary Dance Institute will be founded someday, which would provide his archive with an institutional home. Meanwhile, Moderna galerija has suggested the possibility that his archive could become a permanent part of the Moderna galerija Archives if the necessary conditions were met for the archive to become institutionalized, in which case Vevar could also be employed as archivist.

The TSDA is an indication of several current problems in the field, for example the fact that certain institutions, such as the Slovene Theater Museum, whose remit it is to create and maintain a dance archive, are not fulfilling their mission, as well as the fact that other institutions, like the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, should expand their activities with departments for performing arts and contemporary dance, which would entail meeting special conditions and would require additional funding. What is also highlighted by this case is the precarious worker status of independent curators like Vevar, who has single-handedly carried out an important part of historicizing the local dance scene.

Furthermore, the TSDA, like the *Interrupted Histories* exhibition before it, calls attention to the fact that self-historicizing inevitably alters mainstream practices of history-writing and institutional work. The reason the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova is hosting the TSDA is not simply to help Rok Vevar, but to examine institutional work from a critical and self-critical distance and make this distance visible by “exhibiting” it.

Our point is to show how an institution operates and how non-institutional archives come about, oftentimes resulting from individual initiatives that, subsequently, are incorporated into an institutional structure. This often happens without specifically crediting their originator, who is usually thanked or paid by the institution, while their archive is absorbed into existing classification systems.

The TSDA is also linked to the Balkan dance network called the Nomad Dance Academy, and thus to the group of activist dance archivists, theorists and historians working, since 2013, on the project *Archiving Choreographic Practices in the Balkans*. Like Rok Vevar and the Nomad Dance Academy, Moderna galerija and its Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova have also been working on reproducing the shared cultural space of former Yugoslavia.

Almost destroyed by the wars in the Balkans in the 1990s, this former shared cultural space is now being reconstituted through numerous official and unofficial collaborations involving artists, non-institutional associations,

and increasingly also institutions. In this, Moderna galerija is one of the few institutions intent on preserving these links in the aftermath of the wars of the 1990s. As a matter of fact it was the war in Bosnia that triggered the process of archiving through art, since all too many archives were lost in that war, not to mention people's lives and homes. And searching for lost meaning is also searching for lost truth.

The question of truth thus becomes one of the key questions in art.

Our homes have long ceased to be safe havens where family rituals shape the truth about the world. Which truth have we really lost, if our truth has, in reality, always been mediated, passed down from one generation to the next, or today from one medium to another?

This is exactly what artist archives speak about: that truth has, in reality, never been ours.

An archivist can never fully control the life of an archive; an archive is an open work that repeats a certain reality by repeating the difference between what was present and what was absent. I will give an example of such an archive, or better, an "archival" exhibition I curated together with my colleague Bojana Piškur in 2017, entitled *The Heritage of 1989 / Case Study: The Second Yugoslav Documents Exhibition*.⁶ (fig. 5.4) Staged in Moderna galerija, it was a reenactment of the last major pan-Yugoslav exhibition, which was not only the last big comprehensive, national exhibition, but the last to have the adjective Yugoslav in its title. *The Heritage of 1989* exhibition talked about the loss of a common cultural space and also about the loss of the commons, the commons that had been nurtured both by the ideology of collectivism and of brotherhood and unity in multicultural Yugoslavia. In 1987, three artists from Sarajevo, Jusuf Hadžifejzović, Saša Bukvić and Rade Tadić, decided to organize a biennial in Sarajevo that would put the city on the world art map and make it a center for the arts. Wittily, and perhaps a tad wistfully, they dubbed it *Sarajevska dokumenta*, a pun in Bosnian meaning both the Sarajevo dokumenta (in reference to the Kassel one) and Sarajevo documents, as the show was officially translated. They managed to stage two editions of the biennial and were planning the third when the war put paid to their ambitions. Piškur and I wanted to find out the extent to which the second edition of the biennial in 1989 registered that fateful year and perhaps showed premonitions of war.

6 *Dediščina 1989: Študijski primer: druga razstava Jugoslovanski dokumenti = The Heritage of 1989: Case Study: The Second Yugoslav Documents Exhibition*, eds. Ana Mizerit and Adela Železnik (Ljubljana: Moderna galerija, 2017).

Figure 5.4: “The Heritage of 1989, Case Study: The Second Yugoslav Documents Exhibition,” 2017, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana.



Photo: Moderna galerija.

To curate the exhibition as carefully as possible, my colleague and I went in search of the surviving documentation of the Sarajevo show, most of which was destroyed in the war. Luckily, Jane Štravs, a Ljubljana photographer, had a number of photographs of the exhibition which were printed for our show. As already mentioned, our exhibition aimed to do more than merely reproduce the historical one; rather, it took an interest in why that show had repressed the sociopolitical reality of the time, quite obvious in the summer of 1989. As a reminder of the domestic and international events of 1989, we mounted front pages of all major Yugoslav newspapers from that time along the walls like a frieze, interspersed with works from the original exhibition we managed to obtain. The newspapers covered virtually the entire six-month period prior to the opening of the Sarajevo show, and they were selected in collaboration with the political scientist Tomaž Mastnak, who also wrote a comparative analysis

of the media then and now. In his view, the media of our time is less informative, more corrupt, and more commercialized than the media then.

With our exhibition, we tried to enhance understanding of not only that pivotal moment in time, but, above all, of our own time, marked so fatefully by 1989. The war that followed the breakup of the common federal state triggered the first refugee crisis in Europe after the end of World War II; the second one has occurred recently and does not look like it will be ending any time soon. Through a number of contemporary works of art and through workshops that brought together refugees of both generations, our exhibition pointed to the organic kinship between the two refugee crises under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism.

In the 1990s, we did not lose touch with reality as the postmodernists predicted we would; we lost touch with the real, that is to say, with that which we had never had, and which cannot be represented visually or verbally, although it can be touched upon and articulated in reality through art. What the 1990s taught us was that our reality had not disappeared but was becoming increasingly less comprehensible. The new technologies of the time were also making it more and more invisible. We see the impulse to archive expressed in 20th century art first through photography and then through the inclusion of all manner of documentary material, such as press clippings and similar; by the 1990s, the artists had to come up with alternative means to tackle documenting the invisible landscape of the electromagnetic spectrum.

The war in Bosnia was what spurred Slovene artist Marko Peljhan to start developing technologies, strategies, and tactics for intercepting signals and observing empirical and material developments in the electromagnetic spectrum, which led to his ongoing project *Makrolab* (1997–). One of his crucial works dealing with mapping immaterial information otherwise used by the military industry is *Territory 1995* (2006–2009). *Territory 1995* was based on prolonged research into and investigation of information from all manner of sources that allowed the artist to reconstruct the movements of the troops guilty of the Srebrenica genocide, as well as a view of the involvement and accountability of the international community, especially the Dutch UN battalion stationed there.

The work was an installation in two parts: one was a labyrinth composed of glass surfaces printed with maps created by Peljhan with forensic communications mapping software and algorithms. The other part was an archive consisting of military maps, court documents of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and literature related to the Sre-

brenica genocide and the wider context of the brutal wars on the territories of former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 1995. The archive also included transcripts of radio conversations that clearly indicated the preparations for the massacre. In brief summation, in 1993, Srebrenica was declared a UN “safe zone,” “protected” by Dutch UNPROFOR⁷ troops. On 7 July 1995 Bosnian Serb paramilitary troops, led by Radko Mladić, occupied Srebrenica, which prompted Muslim soldiers and civilians to try to escape to the territory controlled by the Bosniaks; eight thousand of them were captured and executed by the Serbs. In 2002, the Dutch authorities released a report on the role of the Dutch Blue Helmets in the massacre, which resulted in the resignation of the Dutch government and the announcement of an early election. The fact that *Territory 1995* is now included in the Van Abbemuseum’s collection is significant; this is not just any Western museum attempting to museumize Eastern European art, but a museum in the country whose peace-keeping troops knew what was going to happen in Srebrenica and did nothing to prevent it.

Does all that has been said so far allow us to conclude that there is a certain specificity to Eastern European artist archives, both during the socialist period and afterwards? As we peruse publications with international overviews of artist archives today, we mainly encounter Western names; Eastern European artists are few and far between, and mostly from the socialist period. For many, socialism continues to mean a huge space of non-freedom, censorship, monitored typewriters,⁸ confiscated materials, and imprisonments. While it is true that institutions in many places marginalized progressive art, it is also true that some museums in the East nonetheless managed to create important collections and archives. Whichever the case, today we cannot ignore any institutional archive, even if incomplete and originally built by repressive methods. After all, it is thanks to police records that some important materials survive, such as the archive of the material resulting from Andrzej Kosiński and Jarosław Kozłowski sending their *NET Manifesto* to 350 addresses worldwide in 1971, with the ambition to form an alternative network of connections. At the beginning of the process, each addressee received, in addition to the manifesto, also the list of the other addressees and their addresses. All of the artistic material that arrived from all over the world in response to the manifesto was first presented in Jarosław Kozłowski’s apartment in Poznań, and was seized by the secret police. Initially the artists present there were

7 United Nations Protection Force.

8 Typewriters that were installed with hidden sensors to transmit information.

accused of trying to establish an anarchist organization working against the state, but the affair quietened down and the material was returned, at least in part, within the year. Later this material served as the basis for the program at the students' club space in Poznań where Kozłowski founded the Akumulatory 2 Gallery in 1972.

In the 1990s, when the memory of repressive regimes was still fresh, certain artists made direct references to police records or art institutions' archives from the socialist period.

In 1998, the Romanian duo subREAL (Călin Dan and Iosif Kiraly) made an installation entitled *Serving Art*, which incorporate a series of photographs of museum staff holding backgrounds for works of art being photographed. The photos are from the archives of the *Arta* art journal, which dominated the Romanian national art narrative between 1953 and 1989.⁹ These people are in the outer edges of photographs that were to be cropped once the exact format of reproduction was decided upon. *Serving Art* must be understood in the context of the 1990s, when all of Eastern Europe waited with bated breath for secret police records to be made public. Managed differently in different countries, this issue continues to be controversial. SubREAL's work thus points to ideas around public accessibility and the very nature of archival material. The latter is clearly more than just what is classified as such, since ephemeral items not intended to survive in history sometimes speak louder than their official counterparts.

The archives of various state security services have remained an urgent and controversial issue to this day, also because of the numbers of people who would be revealed to have been coerced or manipulated in some way to spy on their friends and acquaintances. Bulgarian artist Nedko Solakov experienced that and decided to go public about it. In 1990, he first presented his work *Top Secret* (1989–90) consisting of an index box filled with a series of cards with his drawings and texts revealing his collaboration with the Bulgarian state security, which he stopped in 1983. In 2007, he added a forty-minute video to the index box, in which he reads from the cards.

Slovene artist Alenka Pirman's 2005 work, *The Case. Art and Criminality*, first presented in Moderna galerija's project space Mala galerija the same year, is an entirely different kind of collaboration with the police. The artist staged the project in collaboration with Biserka Debeljak, the curator of the Slovene

9 For the discussion of another part of this project, see Sven Spieker's chapter in this volume.

Police Museum, and Igor Zabel, a curator at Moderna galerija. The exhibition presented authentic material from police records: documents, photographs and objects relating to the case of a serial killer who raped and murdered several women in Slovenia in the 1970s and then burned their bodies in his stove. Pirman exhibited the documents face down, presenting their undersides to avoid any effect of spectacle which this otherwise notorious case might have caused. This type of presentation would not have been possible at the police museum, whose aim is objective truth. The issue of truth was again at the center of this artistic presentation. The viewers knew the documents were authentic, which fired their imaginations about what was being concealed. The point Pirman was making was that reality was still accessible; she did not believe, however, that it could be objectively classified, especially not through the systems of power.

Repressive Eastern European regimes kept people afraid and feeling they were being constantly watched, surveilled. After the end of the socialist period the feeling of living with the enemy did not fade: first there came the war, then the social and economic crises. This was coupled with incessant hype that contemporary technologies were making the world more and more similar and that we are all now facing a common enemy—capital. I am afraid, however, that a majority of the population worldwide is now choosing to believe in post-truth enemies. The most cynical are those who claim that these enemies are the people coming from elsewhere—the migrants and the refugees, whose numbers are growing. They are coming here with memories of not only their abandoned and destroyed homes, but also of their illegal and perilous journeys to a better world.

In 2017, Slovene artist Nika Autor made a video film *The Train of Shadows*, which opens with a video clip shot with a smart phone, a selfie of a “stow-away,” a refugee hiding, together with another refugee, in the undercarriage of a train traveling from Belgrade to Ljubljana. (fig. 5.5) Arriving in Ljubljana they met Nika Autor, who was at the station as an activist helping refugees, and they entrusted the footage to her. The main question raised by *The Train of Shadows* is whether such a video clip can also have a place in the history of film. Based on that, the introductory scene in the undercarriage is followed by numerous scenes from the history of film featuring trains. The film ends with documentary footage of the devastation at the Belgrade railway station where refugees set up an informal camp in January 2017. There they found themselves in the vicinity of improvised parking lots set up by redundant workers of the Serbian Railways who charge for parking to make ends

meet. This brought together underprivileged Serbs and refugees, both with memories of better times.

Figure 5.5: Nika Autor, “Newsreel 63: The Train of Shadows,” video, 39’, film still, 2017.



Photo: Moderna galerija.

The specifics of Eastern European archives can never be related to the secret police archives, not only because archives like those kept by Stasi and Securitate have long ceased to exist, but also because they never existed in the first place in many parts of Eastern Europe, not even in the most repressive times. Rather than addressing fear of control, this specificity speaks of the wish to change things for the better, and doing that by bypassing existing protocols. In this, Eastern Europe still shares the fate of the many that are not part of the hyper-regulated world and largely depend on informal systems to meet their needs. With every crisis the informal systems grow stronger, bringing together refugees, the unemployed, and artists interested in alternative knowledge and modern-day “piracy.” Informal operations often have negative connotations of being related to crime, corruption and the like, although they can acquire positive implications through inclusion in artist archives. Artist archives are essentially informal, non-institutionalized archives. They are a parallel infrastructure for memories that cannot attach to dominant narratives.

The EU has set up a variety of cultural programs in its aspiration to create a common European cultural space, although we all have different visions of what this space should be like. How can we build a collective memory of Europe when it is divided by the Schengen border and when more and more displaced people are coming here? Whose home is Europe, what does it smell like, and what is the truth being passed down the generations? In Europe, museums are asking themselves how to support refugees and are organizing programs to help them integrate in the local communities. The memories of these refugees are like the images recorded on the video clip in *The Train of Shadows*. Our museums and our collections are still too circumscribed and made to the measure of the collective memory of the dominant communities. We will need different, more hybrid institutions in the future, so that art and other diverse material can, together, formulate stories no longer restricted by the classification systems of collections. Museums based on the principles of artist archives will be better suited to such stories.

Collaborative Actions, Continued Omissions

Notes Toward a Feminist Revisiting of Yugoslav Collectives in the 1960s and 1970s:

The Case of the OHO Group

Lina Džuverović

When writing about the formation and functioning of artists' groups, British literary critic Raymond Williams observed that "the real point of social and cultural analysis, of any developed kind [is] to attend not only to the manifest ideas and activities, but also to the positions and ideas which are implicit or even taken for granted."¹ His critique, written in 1980, addressed the perceived lack of attention and appropriate tools for the study of the workings of cultural groups, as opposed to larger social organizations, such as churches or the educational system.

Since Williams's observation, penned some forty years ago, multiple approaches to the study of artists' groups and collective practice have developed, emerging across fields as diverse as cultural studies, art history, performance studies, sociology, and curatorial and feminist studies, among others, drawing on existing conceptualizations of the relationship between the individual and the collective, but also complexifying the legacies (and ruptures) of collectivity of the twentieth century. Questions of intent and historicization, the analysis of what constitutes a collective, when a collective begins and ends, what differentiates an artists' group from a community of artists, and the nature of artists' communities formed around a particular site or venue, a document, a manifesto, or a set of beliefs are all pertinent to this study. In short, the three aspects of collectivity that interest me are the mechanics and

1 Raymond Williams, "The Bloomsbury Fraction," in *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 356.

processes involved in collective practice, the question of terminology, and the historicization of collectives.

The historicization of collective practice is shaped by how these practices are written about. It is influenced not only by writers' own paradigms with all their conventions and naturalized disciplinary patterns, but also by what material they have to work with in the first place. Take for instance the art-historical convention of citing author, title, material, and year of production when writing about art, which does not account for the iterative, processual, and multi-output "life-as-art" approach of much collective work. Historicization thus operates at an intersection between researchers' own positionality and desire, and an always already reduced material at their disposal, usually generated by the members of collectives themselves or by their close collaborators. Also of importance is the question of what information about the collective is deemed valuable, and inevitably, which members have been doing the talking, collecting, archiving, or discarding. The narratives foregrounded by collectives' own members may or may not align with subsequent accounts of their work, and the outcome is inevitably a patchwork of a narrative forged through a complex web of subjectivities. Acknowledging this, and with the decolonial proposition of pluriversality at heart, we must then ask what is at stake when, as is the case in this text, new readings and voices engage in revisiting collective practice.

Collectives, whether formally articulated or not, have often emerged out of an impetus to perform institutional critique, often functioning as alternative institutions, no matter how non-institutional their core ethos may be. By contrast to more institutional histories, rarely are formal documents available in the wake of these collectives, making the work of revisiting their narratives even more important and multifaceted.

In *Collectivism after Modernism* (2007) Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette problematized the shedding of collectivity's revolutionary past in contemporary practice, seeing contemporary collectives as propped up by what he terms "enterprise culture," the gallery system, and the art world's masterful co-opting of anonymity, collectivity, and ephemerality—lessons learned through the commodification of conceptual and live art.² The terminology used in relation to collective practice—the frequently blurred notions of authorship and participation, and the often interchangeable terms *collectivity*, *collaboration*, *coop-*

2 Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, eds., *Collectivism after Modernism: The Art of Social Imagination after 1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 1–15.

eration, intersubjectivity, co-dependency, etc. open a field of study that requires a whole essay to itself. Ellen Mara De Wachter's neologism "co-art" seeks to act as an umbrella term, with a view to surveying the diverse practices of contemporary artists' collectives, allowing for multiplicity and incongruities amongst the many approaches to collectivity today, evoking Richard Sennett's idea of "a conversation that does not resolve itself by finding common ground."³ Maria Lind's focus on artistic agency has precisely asked to what extent collectivity can disturb and intervene in a system which is so profoundly set on celebrating individual genius as subject.⁴

Such material has introduced a wealth of analytical tools enabling the study not only the creative outputs but also the mechanics and operational structures of artists' groups." The crucial role of collaboration in art cannot be disputed, but the processes, relationships, and operational dynamics within groups remain a field in need of further study. The question of the gendered nature of collectivity is of particular interest here. As Lind observes, "even the lone artist in their studio is dependent upon contributions from others. This is especially true for many male artists who have been able to rely on more or less invisible support from surrounding women," and it is this aspect of collectivity that I wish to focus on.⁵

But even with the recent acknowledgment of the centrality of collectivity in art, in-depth intersectional analyses of factors that determine and shape the nature of artists' involvement in collectives and groups remain scarce. Structural questions examining how collectives are formed, who has agency in their formation, and what their mode of operation as well as their articulation is, need to be underpinned by broader structural explorations of who has access to such networks in the first place and whose names remain associated with groups' legacies after they cease to operate.

In this essay, which is a starting point for a larger project entitled *Collective Actions, Continued Omissions*, which investigates the gendered nature of collective practice, I begin to unpack some of the above, using as a case study the work of the Yugoslav group OHO (1962–71) and the agricultural and artistic commune that followed from it, the Šempas Family, within the broader

3 Quoted in Ellen Mara De Wachter, *Co-Art: Artists on Creative Collaboration* (London: Phaidon, 2017), 20.

4 Maria Lind, "Complications: On Collaboration, Agency and Contemporary Art," *Public* 39 (Spring 2009), 53–73.

5 Lind, "Complications," 73.

context of collective practice in Yugoslavia of the 1960s and 1970s. This was a period that saw a proliferation of artists' groups, often sharing a post-revolutionary ideological basis with both Yugoslav socialism (while also engaging in critical evaluation of it) and the anti-institutional, iconoclastic, and subversive ethos of the global student protests of 1968.⁶

My reason for focusing on the OHO group as the first case study of this project is twofold. Firstly, OHO's multifaceted body of work drew me to further investigate the relationship between their progressive ideas and the group's operational structure, asking whether their hippie, anti-institutional ethos, connection to nature, challenging of rigid social structures, anti-war stance (i.e., anti-Vietnam war slogans depicted in their works), and commitment to collectivity were reflected in the group's own structure and working methods. Secondly, the involvement of numerous women who frequently appeared in OHO's artworks but were rarely credited as their authors, inspired me to investigate the question of gender within the group's activity. What particularly intrigued me was the *tension* between the fluidity and collaborative nature of OHO's ethos used in the production of their works and, in contrast, the rigidity of the group's narrativization, which only cites a small number of male authors, and no female authors, in exhibition catalogs, documentation of works, and video credits, for instance. Ironically, this very tension—*despite* OHO's rejection of many moral structures of Yugoslav society—unwittingly reveals the internalization of patriarchal structures present in the country at the time.⁷

Moreover, whilst I am aware that the collective artistic practices of OHO and this generation of artists (New Art Practice, described below) are universally recognized for their radical potential in breaking down the divide between the hitherto discrete sphere of art and wider publics, through the participatory and inclusive nature of their work creating novel affective artist/au-

6 The project Collaborative Actions, Continued Omissions started in 2019 and will continue through a series of interviews, publications, and a conference.

See <http://dzuverovic.org/?path=/research/collaborative-actions-continued-omissions/>.

7 Much has been written about the complexities of women's position in postwar Yugoslavia. With the proclamation of gender equality, Yugoslav women found themselves in a "double-bind" with the social responsibility of being active citizens who were equal in the workforce while privately struggling with deep-seated sexism in the private sphere. For a detailed discussion, see Bojana Pejić, ed., *Gender Check, A Reader: Art and Theory in Eastern Europe* (Cologne: König, 2010) and Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

dience sensations and relations, they simultaneously fail to reflect on the very nature of the collective—its constitution, practices, and production. The failure to attend to the ways in which collaborative works were produced through the collective reveals a tension between ideological beliefs (deinstitutionalization, deindividualization, the artist being freed from bourgeois beliefs and moral codes) and practice which inadvertently erases from the formal written history of Yugoslav art certain subjects who participated in producing this sensual revolution. My point is simple: the history of these revolutionary artistic movements is incomplete if certain participants of the collective are erased (erasure not necessarily meaning complete omission but also the act of being written into narratives in *particular* and limiting ways). If we consider Rancière's distribution of the sensible—the claim that aesthetics, always already political, have the potential to refigure the political by legitimizing certain ways of seeing, acting, feeling, and acting, then these practices fall short in their revolutionary possibilities.⁸ My attempt here is to expand the revolutionary potential of these groups by writing women into their narratives.

"Everyone's Mother"—The Adoption of Familial Structures

One of the most apparent ways in which the internalization of patriarchal structures becomes visible in collective endeavors in Yugoslavia is through the very absence of female artists from the narratives of the collectives of the period. Take for instance the 1978 New Art Practice catalog edited by Marijan Susovski, the chief curator of Zagreb's Gradska galerija suvremene umjetnosti (City Gallery of Contemporary Art) between 1972 and 2003. The catalog, one of the first articulations of conceptual practices that came to be known as New Art Practice, gives a thorough account of this new and radically different direction in art. The collectives listed include both OHO and the Šempas Family, with their profiles both authored by the art historian Tomaž Brejc, a writer closely linked to the collectives. Brejc's OHO text gives a close and detailed account of the group's developments and works produced, with no female members mentioned. By contrast, the Šempas Family section, giving an overview of the group's radical shift away from art toward life-as-art communal living dutifully lists all members of the group, including women and

8 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2004).

children. It is as if the domain of art is reserved for male protagonists, but as soon as the collective activity is extended to the sphere of social reproduction, women are allowed in, although still seen to be occupying marginal roles.⁹ Of course, the absence of female artists in art collectives was far from unique to OHO. The continued normalization of such narratives is evident in the apparent acceptance of the glaring absences of female protagonists, an inequality seemingly universally accepted as part and parcel of the patriarchal order, even as recently as 2012, which is when I conducted my first interviews.¹⁰ Furthermore, books such as Ješa Denegri's *Prilozi za drugu liniju 3*, published by the Marinko Sudac Collection in 2015, which provides an account of a 100 percent male history of Yugoslav art, only serve to underline the ripple effects and perils of the continuation of partial narratives.¹¹ Frequently, when pointing out this issue in my interviews with cultural workers from the region, the responses would inevitably be accompanied by a sigh: "Yes, I know, the art world was very sexist, it was a different time," my interviewees would explain.

In discussions both with the members of the OHO group and with other cultural workers from the region, certain linguistic discomfort in relation to female members of collectives became apparent. Terms like "lateral women," "backing singers," "the soul of the collective," and "everyone's mother" were used in interviews, by female and male interviewees alike, pointing to the implied affective labor and the naturalized nurturing roles of the women involved in collectives.¹² In many cases the career paths of my interviewees, most of whom came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s, seemed to suggest that male cultural workers found a way to pursue careers as artists whereas

9 Marijan Susovski, *Nova Umjetnicka Praksa* (New art practices) 1966–1978 (Zagreb: Galerija Suvremene Umjetnosti, 1978).

10 The research I refer to here explored Pop Art in socialist Yugoslavia: Lina Džuverović, *Pop Art Tendencies in Self-Managed Socialism: Pop Reactions and Counter-Cultural Pop in Yugoslavia in 1960s and 1970s* (Ph.D. diss., Royal College of Art, 2017, <https://researchonline.rca.ac.uk/z850/>).

11 Ješa Denegri, *Prilozi za drugu liniju 3* (Zagreb: Agroinova: Institut za istraživanja avangarde, 2015).

12 These terms were used in interviews with OHO members David Nez and Marko and Marika Pogačnik, curator Jasna Tijardović, and art historian Beti Žerovc conducted between 2014 and 2019 and were used by the interviewees in conversations about collectives in general, not only OHO.

their female counterparts ended up in the roles of curators, organizers, administrators, archivists, and art historians—roles that foregrounded organizational, promotional, or contextualizing skills over artistic development. We are reminded of Lucy Lippard's observation made in 1971 stating that "It is far easier to be successful as a woman critic, curator, or historian than as a woman artist, since these are secondary, or housekeeping activities, considered far more natural for women than the primary activity of making art."¹³

My aim here is to add to the already rich body of scholarship on gender and art in Yugoslavia by focusing specifically on the way collectivity is historicized. I aim to build on the long history of feminist work in the region including the theoretical writings of Lydia Sklevitsky, Chiara Bonfiglioli, Suzana Milevska, Bojana Pejić, Ivana Bago, Jelena Petrović, and in parallel the curatorial projects of the the Red Min(e)d collective, Mesto Zensk festival, Sanja Iveković's, "Electra," a distribution network for women artists, and the work of the Centre for Women's Studies Zagreb, amongst many others.

Tendencies in the Historicization of Artists Groups

The phenomenon of male-dominated networks of Yugoslav artists of course did not begin in the 1960s but dated back to earlier artistic endeavors, such as those avant-garde groups formed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918–41). Enormously influential networks such as the avant-garde movement Zenitism and its associated magazine *Zenit*, which operated in Belgrade and then Zagreb (1921–26), with ties to Italian Futurists and a broad European network, consisted exclusively of male members. Similarly, the Zenitist-inspired Traveleri group (founded in 1922) included only one woman, Višnja Kranjčević, whose limited biography states that she worked in administration at the Croatian National Theatre (HNK) but little else is known about her professional or artistic life.

This was also the case with the artists' collective Zemlja (The Earth) (1929–35), whose ten founding members were all male, and which had only two women exhibiting within their later exhibitions: the designer Branka Hegedušić-Frangeš and the Bauhaus-trained weaver Otti Berger. A few decades later, Exat 51 (1950–56), a Zagreb-based group of designers, artists,

13 Lucy Lippard, quoted in Nanne Buurman, "Angels in the White Cube? Rhetorics of Curatorial Innocence at DOCUMENTA 13," *On Curating* 29 (May 2016), 157.

and architects, counted no female members, while the group Gorgona, the authors of the playful eponymous “anti-magazine” whose activities started in 1977 in Zagreb, equally gathered an entirely male network of eminent artists and art historians.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the introduction of conceptual art and pop culture when many Yugoslav artists, by then known as the New Art Practice generation, began to experiment, in many cases through forming collectives or, from the early 1970s onwards, gathering less formally around the newly created Student Cultural Centres in Belgrade, Zagreb, and Ljubljana. Even though by that point a much larger number of female artists were active in the country, including the now well-known Sanja Iveković, Marina Abramović, Katalin Ladik, Bogdanka Poznanović, and others, the more formalized networks remained organized and led by male artists.

For instance, The Group of Six Artists, in Zagreb (1975 onwards), whose members were Boris Demur, Željko Jerman, Vlado Martek, Mladen Stilinović, Sven Stilinović, and Fedor Vučemilović, organized “exhibition-actions” in non-art spaces. It is not until 1978, when the Group of Six Artists launched the magazine *MAJ/75*, that the work of female artists was first included in its activities. *MAJ/75*, which ran for eighteen issues over six years, was printed in the studio of artists Vlasta Delimar and Željko Jerman, and it is through this collaboration that Delimar’s work was included.¹⁴

Despite socialist Yugoslavia’s (1943–91) progressive political position vis-à-vis gender equality (at least in terms of its public proclamations), artistic networks showed no signs of living up to this particular aspect of the country’s promises of equality, at least not through their own structures. Women who came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s in

Yugoslavia matured into what would prove to be a conflicting value system. On the one hand, they were brought up on the legacy of, and had great respect for, Yugoslavia’s vital women’s organization, the Anti-fascist Women’s Front (Antifašistički front žena, AFŽ), which was an active entity during the

14 This account is not intended to be a comprehensive history of groups or collectives across the ex-Yugoslav cultural space, but a small sample used as an illustration of an overarching tendency observed during my research. Drawing attention to these groups’ structures is as a way of triggering a conversation about the relation between their activities and their very foundations. Many other groups such as Decembarska Grupa (1955–60, Belgrade), Bosch+Bosch (1969, Subotica), Grupa TOK (1968), grupa 143 (1975–80) could equally be added to this list as examples of histories in which women either played marginal roles or no roles at all.

Second World War and central to women's postwar emancipation.¹⁵ The legacy of the AFŽ promulgated equality between women and men (including equal pay) and sought to enable women to be active working members of society. On the other hand, Yugoslav women found themselves facing a gradual return of prewar bourgeois patriarchal traditions which dominated the private sphere and strove to make them once again solely responsible for domestic life and child-rearing (while upholding an outward image of their social equality).

As Bojana Pejić has highlighted, Yugoslav women found themselves negotiating private (the home) and public (the state) patriarchy while also gradually becoming “the invisible subject.” “In the wake of WW2 women did gain equal rights but also a new kind of invisibility” summarized Jelena Petrović in writing about women's authorship in interwar Yugoslavia, and this was equally the case for female artists as for any other working women.¹⁶

The Different Phases of OHO

OHO was an artists' collective formed in 1962, in Kranj, Yugoslavia (today Slovenia). It comprised core members Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Marko

15 The Antifašistički front žena (AFŽ) was a women's social and political organization founded on December 6, 1942, in Bosanski Petrovac in Bosnia as part of the People's Liberation Struggle during the Second World War. Its primary goal was to unite all women in the struggle against the fascist enemy, which it strove to achieve through the inclusion of women in the partisan struggle, participation in armed operations and diversionary activities, organization of childcare, and actions related to the cultural and educational upbringing of women. Following the liberation of the country, the AFŽ engaged in addressing the consequences of the war on health, social, and cultural issues, particularly the care of the wounded and the children who had become war orphans. The AFŽ worked to enable the emancipation of women, investing great efforts into including women as broadly as possible in economic and political life. The AFŽ was active in the spheres of medical care, counselling, organization of school cafeterias, collective laundries, and dry-cleaning services. The AFŽ strongly opposed discrimination and disrespect toward women and gradually grew into a powerful social and political force in the country. The AFŽ was dissolved in 1953, after a decision by the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia based on the argument that the goal of gender equality could be more effectively reached through non-gender-specific agencies. The AFŽ was also criticized for allegedly becoming too involved in politics (in essence, for being too successful and having too much power), which led to its demise.

16 Jelena Petrović, *Women's Authorship in Interwar Yugoslavia: The Politics of Love and Struggle* (London: Palgrave, 2019).

Pogačnik, and Andraž Šalamun as well as a host of collaborators including Iztok Geister-Plamen, Marjan Ciglič, Tomaž Šalamun, Matjaž Hanšek, Naško Križnar, Vojin Kovač-Chubby, Aleš Kermavner, Franci Zagoričnik, Marika Pogačnik, Zvona Ciglič, and Nuša and Srečo Dragan.¹⁷ Many other artists, poets, and thinkers had “light” associations with OHO, and were involved under a loose umbrella known as the OHO Katalog (OHO Catalog), sporadically collaborating with the founding members and participating in actions and projects. The group worked in Kranj, and Ljubljana between 1962 and 1971, later moving to Šempas, a small village in the Vipava valley in western Slovenia. Their activities ranged from literature and visual poetry to films, happenings, land art, and conceptual and participatory performances. OHO’s early work was conceptually aligned with Arte Povera, land art, and happenings, and also incorporated body art practices, which combined into what Tomaž Brejc termed “transcendental conceptualism,” referring to that which reaches beyond what our senses can represent. The group explored human connections to nature and the relationship between the body and its environment, and it also took inspiration from systems theory to create their installations. OHO was by no means unique in its broad range of activities, but the group’s sudden and decisive withdrawal from the context of art in 1971 to form a commune and farm their own food stood out as an unusual gesture. In what is today a heavily mythologized act, the group was dissolved in 1971, decisively performing an exodus from the art context and the urban environment to settle in the Slovenian village of Šempas, to live off the land as a commune, under the moniker “The Šempas Family,” in order to be closer to nature and to work as a group in harmony with the environment and the cosmos. The commune lasted for many years, despite the members’ initial lack of knowledge of how to cultivate vegetables or live off the land. Eventually it was only Marko and Marika Pogačnik and their children who continued to live at this location, and the pair remain there to this day.

17 This is the most common list of artists associated with OHO as listed on the Kontakt Collection, Kuda.org, and Monoskop websites, among others, becoming the account that is most “practical” and most frequently replicated in academic sources. However, it is worth noting the shifting authorship within the group and the way individual projects are credited. For instance, in *Impossible Histories*, Miško Šuvaković’s text lists different phases of the OHO group which are useful in a more detailed analysis of how authorship is attributed. Miško Šuvaković, “Conceptual Art,” in *Impossible Histories: Historical Avant-Gardes, Neo-Avant-Gardes, and Post-Avant-Gardes in Yugoslavia, 1918–1991*, eds. Dubravka Djurić and Miško Šuvaković (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 213–18.

In relation to OHO, the central question that interested me was one of participation in artistic networks—who were the women we see in OHO's Super-8 films and in documentary material of the group's actions? What was the connection these women had to the actions of this early hippie art group, why were they willing to take part in these works, and most importantly, what happened to them afterwards? Are some of them artists today? The obvious answer, which I frequently encountered, was that these were girlfriends or friends of the male artists, who were, ostensibly, “hanging around” as a form of entourage of the group. In some cases these relationships developed into creative partnerships (the topic of artist couples is closely related to mine but is beyond the scope of this essay), while in many cases today we hear of the artists' groups but rarely do we hear about those who were involved in informal ways. I became particularly interested in women who for whatever reason did not cultivate their own artistic careers but who repeatedly appear around the groups in question, often taking supportive and nurturing roles.

Interviewing OHO members—Division of Labor, and Authorship versus Participation

My interviews with OHO members so far have included a conversation with founding member David Nez, whom I interviewed in 2014 in Poreč, Croatia, and a joint interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, at their home in Šempas, Slovenia, in 2019.

A central question emerged pertaining to different conceptions of what constitutes *authorship* versus what constitutes *participation*, and to the gendered nature of these ideas. Authorship in OHO, it emerged, is associated with the genesis of an idea, the “birth” of the overarching concept, while execution and realization are seen to exist in the realm of participation, or general “support.” It is along these lines that involvement with OHO appears to have been delineated, albeit without the artists themselves feeling much of a need to search for such structuring devices.

In the process of preparing and conducting my interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, the dynamics of the different roles within the group immediately became evident through Marika's reluctance to be interviewed. I initially approached the couple via Marko Pogačnik's email address, following on from my initial correspondence with him in 2014. Despite my insistence

that it was *both* of them I wished to interview, I was repeatedly asked whether Marika's presence would really be necessary.

Some months later, in August 2019, the interview took place at their house in Šempas (the home of the Šempas Family commune, where the couple still live), with both Marika and Marko hosting us on their veranda (I was kindly accompanied by a fellow curator and museum director, Saša Nabergoj). The interview started with them asking me once again whether Marika really needed to stay, making it clear that they would rather I spoke to Marko only. Upon my insistence on Marika's presence, she did remain for the duration of the interview, but it was Marko who took the lead in answering my questions. As the interview progressed, I occasionally interjected, interrupting the flow of Marko's answers, explicitly directing the same questions to Marika.

Marika frequently left the table, excusing herself in order to tend to the food that was being cooked. Her tone was filled with humor. As a way of explaining her reluctance to take part in the interview, she laughingly stated:

I am a very bad speaker [conversationalist]. I am a good worker but a bad speaker. So, it is all divided. Some of us work, some of us speak. [*laughs*]

To this Marko added,

Without her, nothing would work.¹⁸

Despite OHO's and the Šempas Family's deep commitment to the unity of art and life, a profoundly ingrained hierarchy between the way ideas are generated and their delivery and production was evident, as demonstrated in Marko's explanation of OHO's working process:

And authorship did not exist, really, authorship did not exist. This work was collective. My concepts were the only authorship; I thought it was important that what we were doing would have a concept and to express that, for it to be conceptually clear, to be presented.¹⁹

Articulating simultaneously the lack of authorship and a clear attachment to singular authorship epitomizes the dichotomy in OHO—the genuine belief in collaboration halted by a reluctance to unravel the structures that propped up the smooth functioning of the group. This double conception of roles involved in the making of an artwork was articulated differently by various members

18 Author's interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik, Šempas, Slovenia, August, 2019.

19 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

of the group. The nurturing, supportive role women played within OHO was also foregrounded by David Nez, a founding member of the OHO group, in an interview in which I asked him about the presence of female artists in OHO's works:

That's a really good question. I don't know—we just never really had any women. They always played more of a supportive role. Maybe that was just the '60s ... [...] It wasn't until feminism that women started coming out and having a voice. I mean, you could say that we were the continuity of the same old patriarchal ...

But it is a good question, I think it was just the fact that the '60s had not yet seen women's liberation, it wasn't till later when that really came along. We never even thought about that. There were not really any women that were involved in the avant-garde as far as I know.

I had a girlfriend, and she was always kind of jealous of OHO but she was never a part of the inner circle. We just had a strong bond between us, the four or five of us. Marika was always ... the soul in a sense. She'd invite everyone for dinner, she was like everybody's mother, she was like my mother, like my surrogate mother, you know?

LD: Yes, nurturing, supportive, and kind?²⁰

For Nez, an American artist who studied in Ljubljana, who participated in early OHO activities as a founding member but moved back to the United States in 1972, the women involved were practically invisible, while he also implies a certain co-dependence and reliance on their presence, support, and participation.

An example of such hierarchies can also be seen in the credits of the 35 mm film *Beli Ljudje* (White People, 1969/1970), featuring a large group of men, women, children, and animals covered in white body paint handling white objects and eating white food in an entirely white environment. In the credits, the author of the work is cited as Naško Križnar, another "core" OHO member, with a host of collaborators working on the script, while the other participants are listed as "bodies." (fig. 6.1) Art historian Ksenya Gurshtein has observed that

In *Beli Ljudje*, the term "bodies" points not only to the transnational 1960s rhetoric of the sexual liberation of the body, but also highlights the uncertain

20 Author's interview with David Nez, Poreč, Croatia, July 2014.

status of the people we see on the screen as neither the actors' real selves (since the film is scripted), nor those of properly named or defined fictional characters.²¹

Figure 6.1: Naško Križnar, "Beli Ljudje" (White People), 1970, 12'.



Stills from the 35 mm film. Courtesy of Marko Pogačnik.

The participants' semi-fictional roles in OHO's works, their willingness to take part and act out a script (or in many street actions, to follow set rules and instructions), bring forth the question of agency in the making of these works. The question of what constituted authorship is highlighted in Nez's thinking about Marika Pogačnik's participation:

DN: Yes, but she wasn't really an artist.

LD: She didn't think of herself in that way?

DN: Yes, but she was very talented in terms of crafts and sewing and all that

21 Ksenya Gurshtein, "When Film and Author Made Love: Reconsidering OHO's Film Legacy," *Kino!* 11–12 (November, 2010).

and collaborated a lot with Marko. And she has, since then, assumed, very much, the role of a collaborator.

The useful deployment of traditional gendered hierarchies of art and craft fits smoothly into the relegation of women's roles to those of careers and the transposition of familial roles onto the collective. This is echoed in Marko Pogačnik's spatial analogy which depicts a binary gendered division between the "internal" (private) and "external" (public) sphere:

That is yin and yang, something is toward the internal life of a group, not just the wives and friends but others that were part of this circle, that was facing internally. And facing outwardly were men. Internally, women had the main role, facing outwards were the men. And there is some sense in that, in the end.²²

He goes on to state that later this changed and in their later works they searched for an equilibrium, as part of their quest for the unity of art and life. He spoke about the works made as part of the Šempas Family in which the women and children were involved.

That changed, later we were not happy with that, that was one of the reasons why we formed a commune, where that shared moment was at the center, [...] we then moved onto works where women and children took part too. For example, the mobiles made of wool and wood, clay and steel, and drawings [...]. That was life/work in the fields and in the workshops with clay and wool ... we tried to find an ideal way to achieve an equilibrium.²³

While there is no doubt that Marko Pogačnik (alongside a number of other artists) had a leading role in the authorship of OHO's works, accounts also point to the agency of Marika Pogačnik beyond the roles of producer, nurturer, and "surrogate mother." In the interview with art historian Beti Žerovc in *ARTMargins* (2013), a number of Marko Pogačnik's statements reveal Marika's active involvement not only in the making of the work but also in decision-making:

22 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

23 Interview with Marko and Marika Pogačnik.

My wife Marika and I drew conceptual diagrams of all our projects so that we could make copies and distribute them.²⁴

This was followed by:

When Walter de Maria came to Kranj to visit Marika and me, he tried to talk us into that [becoming actively involved in the international conceptual art scene—LD], on the grounds that we could rank high, as it were, among conceptual groups internationally. In the end, though, we decided on a completely different step, based on our group spiritual schooling.²⁵

The role played by Marika Pogačnik in OHO and the Šempas Family is no doubt as crucial as that played by her partner, Marko Pogačnik. But it is *the way* in which her role is articulated and the value that is assigned to the type of work she contributed that renders her input seemingly less valuable in the grand hegemonic narratives of art history. Just as in other work environments, artistic work is dependent upon the invisible, un(der)paid, and undervalued work of social reproduction, without which even the basic structures would collapse. In the case of OHO, might it be possible to take Marko Pogačnik to task in his quest to “achieve an equilibrium” in the Šempas Family by broadening the realm of authorship to encompass (and make visible) *all* of the Šempas Family’s activities, thus expanding the boundaries of what it means to develop a concept for a work of art?

As Mierle Laderman Ukeles’s “Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: CARE” has taught us, the visible “top layer” of art only exists because it rests on numerous invisible layers of work done to enable the visible, i.e., the artwork. Ukeles aptly reminds us that the balance between the highly valued work that she terms “Development” and the overlooked and undervalued work that is “Maintenance” is never going to be equal because “maintenance is a drag. It takes all the fucking time.”²⁶ The equilibrium Pogačnik refers to can thus only be achieved if cooking, cleaning, raising children, and producing craftwork are seen, valued, and made visible as intrinsic to the highly valued process of concept development.

24 Beti Žerovc, “The OHO Files: Interview with Marko Pogačnik,” *ARTMargins Online*, July 27, 2013, <http://artmargins.com/the-oho-files-interview-with-marko-poganik/>.

25 Žerovc, “The OHO Files.”

26 Mierle Laderman Ukeles “Manifesto for Maintenance Art, 1969! Proposal for an Exhibition: CARE,” 1969 <https://feldmangallery.com/exhibition/manifesto-for-maintenance-art-1969>.

So, what is to be done about gendered art historical narratives which continue to reproduce hierarchies of highly valued *authors* and undervalued “*support workers*”? The tension underpinning the workings of OHO—a group ahead of its time which set out to challenge established moral norms and, in forming the Šempas Family, also shunned the nuclear family structure—is the tension of deeply embedded patriarchal, heteronormative structures which even OHO’s radical thinkers could not transgress.

Notes toward Feminist Interventions into Art’s Histories

While a critical analysis of Yugoslav collectives based on gender differentiations may obfuscate the political potential of collective practices, and particularly the undoing of individualism running through the veins of the art system, such an analysis cannot be ignored, as collective artistic practices that aim to free us from individualism cannot succeed in doing so if they reproduce the very inequalities (including gender) that they seek to undo. The perpetuation of inequality and subjugation of certain subjects within the collective fundamentally limits the group’s potential to deinstitutionalize and deindividualize. Simply accepting existing narratives, those centered on artworks as the only valid and valuable outputs of the achievements of these collectives, is no longer acceptable, and a paradigm shift is needed to allow for *all* aspects of collective activities to be understood as constituent and equal elements of their work, thus rendering the hitherto passive voices into key active agents of their operations.

In seeking to define a feminist approach to building contemporary paradigms of knowledge production about historical art practices, we must think with Griselda Pollock that we are not creating “a feminist art history but a ‘feminist intervention’ in art’s histories.”²⁷ Strategies for such interventions must transform not just our thinking but the discipline as a whole, drawing not just on art history itself but on a much broader constellation of struggles, connecting to the legacy of the women’s movement, building allegiances across a number of fields. As Elke Krasny, in search for such an approach, noted: “it is indeed possible to initiate dialogue and to create temporary

27 Griselda Pollock, “Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction,” in: *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 5.

alignments between activists, artists, curators, educators, historians, museum directors, researchers, theorists and scholars who are actively involved in women's museums or in the field of feminist curating.”²⁸

Lastly, in thinking with Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry about the writing of art histories, we may ask what would happen if we might for a moment turn away from feminist artists to feminist curators? In the case of Yugoslavia, my research has, unsurprisingly, revealed myriad women's perspectives—these are the women whose careers turned away from making and toward contextualizing, enabling, curating, producing, and, yes, supporting other artists. The women I interviewed and continue to interview are the ones whose narratives have remained secondary, those so-called “support workers” whose own achievements, conveniently for neat hegemonic narratives, fell outside of the boundaries of “authorship” worth writing about, thus remaining invisible, or at best, secondary. Thinking with Dimitrakaki and Perry:

Could such a turn (imagined rather than actual at present) discover a different route into feminism's art histories? Would this displacement of the artist in favour of the curator permit greater insight into why feminism has not in fact succeeded at transforming a capitalist art institution (once belonging to the west but now globally hegemonic) that has, arguably and paradoxically, managed to both include women artists and exclude or neutralize feminist politics?²⁹

Perhaps if the stories of these women were to be seen as primary accounts, as opposed to secondary narratives telling others' stories, we may begin to intervene into art's histories through a more textured and nuanced set of experiences and perspectives.

28 Elke Krasny, “Introduction,” in *Women's Museum: Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art*, eds. Elke Krasny and Frauenmuseum Meran (Vienna: Löcker Verlag, 2013), 16.

29 Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 17.

Expansive Underground

Artpool's Path from Self-Institutionalization to a Museum

Emese Kürti

In 1981 the Museum of Fine Arts commissioned György Galántai, who at the time was earning a living from graphic design, to design a poster for a nationwide museum event with the theme of museums and monuments at its focus. Taking a text-based, minimalistic approach with no visual elements, he solved the task by using the Hungarian translation of Jean Cocteau's poem *Sculptures*.¹ The festive tone of the classical piece composed by the avant-garde poet takes an unexpected turn in the last stanza and introduces a sharp contrast between the finesse of antiquity and the imagined attitude of the museum attendant:

Voluptuous Venuses, pliant-bodied nymphs,
divine mortals, mortal divinities,
a blind-eyed and speechless marble host,
I know your words and the rare secret of your gazes.

O, what celebration! Leaving behind futile,
animalistic desires and senseless love,
tracing the contours of your soft blue veins,
warming your frozen bodies with kisses.

¹ *Jean Cocteau válogatott versei* (Selected poems by Jean Cocteau), transl. into Hungarian, György Somlyó (Budapest: Európa, 1961), translated into English by Krisztina Sarkady-Hart.

Have you never felt, you, lover of exhibitions,
enchanted by the divine perfection of forms,
a desire, confused magic—while the silence slowly

envelopes the noise of ambling admirers,
and the spaced-out attendant turns away—
a desire to steal a kiss onto the lips of the statues?

As György Galántai remembers, the wording of the poster hit a soft spot with the attendants of the Museum of Fine Arts, who, being outraged by the text, demanded that the document be removed from all public areas. This small affair between the attendants, representing the museum and classical culture, and the artist, who can be linked with an experimental spirit, shed light on the discursive distance between the spheres represented by these two parties in socialist Hungary.

But how could such an interaction even take place between the players from different spectrums of the contemporary cultural scene? How could it happen that a culturally and existentially marginalized artist was commissioned with a project, albeit very small, by the most mainstream institution representing the art canon. It is already part of the art history of this era that György Galántai, the founder of the emblematic Balatonboglár Chapel Studio (1970–73)² and the Artpool Art Research Center (1979),³ was a well-known organizer of the unofficial cultural scene, who had to bear with the disadvantages resulting from his position. The place he occupied in the cultural scene of the socialist regime and its historical accounts was shaped by the discourses of the counterculture and dissident ethics, which, at the same time, is in a dialectic relationship, in certain aspects, with his self-interpretation, self-historicizing, and personal narrative.⁴ Galántai and Júlia Klani-

2 *Törvénytelen avantgárd: Galántai György balatonboglári kápolnaműterme 1970–1973* (Illegal avant-garde: The chapel studio of György Galántai in Balatonboglár 1970–1973), eds. Júlia Klaniczay and Edit Sasvári (Budapest: Artpool–Balassi Publisher, 2003).

3 About the program and operation of Artpool, jointly established with Júlia Klaniczay, see György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, eds., *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe* (Budapest: Artpool, 2013).

4 Cf.: Emese Kürti and Zsuzsa László, “‘Engem az információ érdekelt mindig’: évfordulós beszélgetés Galántai Györggyel” (I have always been interested in information, anniversary interview with György Galántai) *Exindex*, 19 September, 2019, <http://exindex.hu/index.php?l=hu&page=3&id=1081>.

czay's proactive cultural strategy was aimed at establishing an autonomous institution in Hungary embedded in the that time present reality of contemporary art, which would not take the dissident path of parallel culture, but gradually build itself up by using the mastered liberal methodology of self-management in the loopholes of the changing cultural policy environment.

Thus, in Galántai's case, the term heroic avant-garde, introduced to local discourses in the 1980s, seems both applicable and fit to be demolished since his institution, the Artpool Art Research Center, which has been operating for forty years, can, if you will, be interpreted as the refutation of the failure of the neo-avant-garde conceptual model.⁵ In this study I will put forward an argument supporting Artpool's ambitions pointing beyond the scale of atomized underground initiatives, as well as the acceptance of a marginalized situation and the restricted perspective of local culture; not opposing the early history of the avant-garde, moreover, canonizing it, their objective, already in the 1980s, was to realize a higher level of institutionalization. The strategy Galántai used for his art archive inspired by international examples⁶ can be best described by the term expansive underground, which simultaneously refers to an underground status and the intention to expand and move out of the informality of the underground.

To substantiate the above, I will first show how the privately founded archive was built on premises responding to collective cultural needs and, at the same time, rooted in the self-historicizing practices of the 1970s. This will

5 In his infamous presentation of 1982, recording the avant-garde—postmodern turn, Ákos Birkás sums up the unrealized elements of the avant-garde “bundle of demands,” an important part of which was to operate within an institutional framework, i.e. to create its own institutions, which did not take place in Hungary. “Here, no such thing happened, because it couldn't. What could happen was ... I am not going to look at Galántais, I will look somewhere to the side ... because they are the only ones who handled the question of institute-making with great artistic instinct.” English translation was published: Ákos Birkás, “Death of the Avant-Garde (Excerpts),” in *Art Always Has Its Consequences: Artists' Texts from Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Serbia 1947-2009*, ed. Dóra Hegyi et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press; Budapest: tranzit.hu), 140.

6 In 1972 Galántai hitch-hiked across Western Europe visiting the most important art centers; the documenta in Kassel was one of the most important experiences for him, while a small underground space, the Depot in Cologne, served as an important source of inspiration for his institutionalized archiving project. György Galántai, “Hogyan tudott a művészet az életben elkezdődni? Adalékok a boglári történethez” (How was art able to begin in real life? Supplements to the Balatonboglár story) in *Törvénytelen avant-gárd*, 72.

be followed by a case study detailing the occasional cooperation between the Artpool Art Research Center and the Museum of Fine Arts prior to the political transition in Hungary, which facilitates the interpretation not only of the contemporary dispositions of the archive at the time but also of its current institutional situation.

Figure 7.1: György Galántai's advertising action: tourist sign on the tower of the Balatonboglár Chapel, 1971.



Courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center and György Galántai

György Galántai's Chapel Studio in Balatonboglár between 1970 and 1973 was an emancipatory attempt taken by members of the unofficial art scene in Hungary at expanding the framework of socialist modernism in an improvisatory way, in accordance with the art practices of the day, and using strategic methods. (fig. 7.1) A unique feature of Galántai's collective initiative, was that it was launched as a kind of socialist community project integrating the entire contemporary art scene without prioritizing between the different aesthetic platforms.⁷ In contrast to the majority of neo-avant-garde artists in Hungary, Galántai reacted to the cultural reality of existing socialism not as an outsider but as a critical participant. He accepted it as a given reality which could be handled by critically adopting the linguistic tools of Marxism and exploring the cracks of technocracy. The four-year operation of the Chapel Studio was made possible by avoiding direct confrontation, while identifying strategic gaps, continuously negotiating with the authorities, escaping by running ahead and practicing proactive self-management.

By establishing an exhibition and events venue as well as a meeting place for the subculture of the times, Galántai modelled the operation of an autonomous intellectual space and provided the thus far missing infrastructure available for underground art groups. The intentions and principles manifest in Galántai's institution-organizing practice had been taking shape from the late 1960s in the criteria of a research approach, communal functions, and the notions of information exchange, and were taken to the next scale with the launch of the Artpool project in 1979. The core material of the Artpool archive, set up in the studio flat of the founders, were the archive documents produced in the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio project, while the archive's collecting policy was defined by the need to document the events of progressive contemporary art and the unofficial cultural scene. The collection was augmented through documents created for the calls, art projects, and exhibitions initiated by Artpool, and the exchange of primarily paper-based works and mail art pieces arriving by post, which were framed by Galántai's active archive⁸

7 Emese Kürti, "Underground Realism: György Galántai's Institutional Strategies," in *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicisation as Artistic Practice in Central-East Europe*, ed. Daniel Grúň (Bratislava: VEDA; SAS Publishing House; Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2020), 23–66.

8 "The idea behind the Artpool project is to create an 'ACTIVE ARCHIVE' built on specific artistic activities. This differs from traditional archival practices in that the 'ACTIVE ARCHIVE' does not only collect material already existing 'out there,' but the way it operates also generates the very material to be archived. By documenting the thoughts

concept, which is still relevant today. As can be read in the diary entries kept by Galántai at the time of Artpool's foundation, he envisioned the long-term preservation of documents belonging to the sphere of collective knowledge within the framework of a museum:

The founding of ARTPOOL, 1979

Primary aims:

1. To collect material for the museum of artistic inventions scheduled to open in 2079.
2. To inspire the founding of the museum.
3. To fill the gap, for the time being, with spaces available periodically.
4. To operate as part of the museum when it is established (according to the original plans).⁹

The museum, therefore, played the conceptual role of a utopian institution in Galántai's developing concept, for which the archival work and the exhibition activity in "periodic spaces,"¹⁰ inspired by Fluxus artist Robert Filliou, were part of a preparatory phase and structure. Galántai was not familiar with the theories of museum criticism of the 1960s, which had already been losing their significance by this time, nor was he aware of the overseas concepts institutional critique revived in the 1980s,¹¹ which is why his plans aimed at

circulating within the worldwide network of free and autonomous art, this live archive is brought into being but still remains invisible to profit-oriented art." György Galántai, "Active Archive, 1979–2003," in *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, eds. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 15, https://www.artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

- 9 Galántai: *Életmunkák = Galántai: Lifeworks 1968–1993*, exhibition catalog, ed. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool; Enciklopédia, 1996), 244.
- 10 The postcard sent by the French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou to Budapest in 1979 inspired Galántai to establish the Artpool Periodical Space (APS), in the spirit of Filliou's "Congenial Republic" (*La république géniale*), which connected exhibitions, events and actions organized and held at various venues, <https://www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Filliou/Fillioucard.html>.
- 11 As Andrea Fraser writes, art that is critical of institutions questions the structure and operational method of museums and galleries; art and artists are antagonistically opposed to the institutions they are presented in, as these institutions merge the originally radical ideas into their entities and turn them into mere products. Andrea Fraser, "From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique," in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zürich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 127. In this sense Galántai and the Artpool project were not against institutions as they did not concern them-

a museum primarily responded to the needs of the local contemporary art scene. According to the statement of the founders expressed today, Artpool was not conceived in the spirit of denial, i.e. as an expression of dissatisfaction towards the official cultural policy, but it was primarily based on the need for autonomous intellectual operation and the democratization of information and, secondly, it sought to critically respond to the power battles within the Hungarian contemporary cultural scene, as well as to the lack of transparency and knowledge sharing. The foundation of the archive was the clear announcement of an activity that exceeded the former, marginalized positions of neo-avant-garde self-organization and its narrow microcosm. By the mid-1980s Artpool appeared as a private institution carrying out not only the classical duties of archival-documentation but also publishing a samizdat art periodical titled *Artpool Letter* (AL), while nurturing an extended international artist network, organized international exhibitions and operated an underground pseudo-radio by distributing audio cassettes.

The next level of institutionalization would have been an interdisciplinary initiative which Artpool's founders, encouraged by the success of AL, named Contemporary Art Association (KME). The idea of establishing an association as a possible institutional form arose after the Budapest Festival Orchestra was formed as an association; this would have opened the way to legal operation. As recorded in the minutes dated June 1984, the founding members were artists and intellectuals like Ákos Birkás (president), Tamás Ascher, Imre Bak, Dezső Ekler, Péter Forgács, Lóránd Hegyi, György Jovánovics, Péter Nádas, Tibor Szemző, Annamária Szőke (deputy secretary), Anna Wessely, András Wilhelm, and Júlia Klaniczay (executive secretary).¹² According to the ambitious plans, the association was to be the forum of "outstanding and novel initiatives" promoted by publications, events, debates and exhibitions as well as pursuing educational activity. The legalization of the initiative was rejected in July 1985 by deputy minister Dezső Tóth with the following argument: the planned cultural activities are the responsibility of the state, in effect carried out by several head departments and institutions of the ministry, therefore it is not deemed justified that "a new association should seek a role for itself and create functions for itself that belong to the state and to already existing art

selves with the system of state institutions or the critique of the establishment but rather sought to establish a parallel or alternative institution.

12 The full documentation on the Contemporary Art Association (Kortárs Művészeti Egyesület) can be found at the Artpool Art Research Center.

societies.”¹³ The letter of the ministry reveals that at that time the state was striving to maintain its cultural hegemony; this intention of theirs, however, was gradually eroded during the end of the decade, primarily due to the operation of the Soros Foundation.¹⁴ Two years later, in 1987, deputy secretary György Vajda himself recommended that the application for the association to be founded should be resubmitted, and although the first steps were taken to this end, the changes in the political system towards democratization and Galántai winning a DAAD scholarship to Berlin finally put paid to the original objectives.

This circumstance indicates that the foundation of Artpool and its first period overlapped with radical changes in aesthetics and politics, the documentation of which was partly carried out by the Artpool Archives. The relationship between art and cultural policy underwent significant change compared to the rather repressive period of the first half of the 1970s, when the conceptual framework of socialist realism still fulfilled some ideological content and the critical intellectuals had not yet left the country. From the early 1980s, however, the state delegated the responsibilities of cultural policy making to people who were not only accepted by a large part of the contemporary art scene but also had a functioning international network. From 1984 the most important exhibition venue for contemporary art, the Műcsarnok/Kunsthalle, was directed by Katalin Néráry, and from then on the institution gradually resembled a Western European contemporary cultural center, which fit in with the

13 Letter of deputy minister Dezső Tóth to Júlia Klaniczay, July 23, 1985, Artpool Art Research Center. In the background of rejecting the association's official registration was the ongoing surveillance by the secret police (sub-division III/III-4b of the Interior Ministry) of Galántai, under the cover name "Painter" since 1979. The conclusion of the report dated April 16, 1985 states that "some of the persons requesting the registration of the association and intending to join it in the future are involved in dissident activity directed by Galántai targeting the general and cultural policies of the party. Knowing their activities up to now, it is to be expected that the 'Contemporary Art Association' will serve as a platform to form a hostile base active in the area of fine arts, therefore, the rejection of the application is justified," <https://www.galantai.hu/festo/1985/850416S.html>.

14 About the cultural role played by the Soros Foundation, which supported Artpool, among others, see Kristóf Nagy, "From Fringe Interest to Hegemony: The Emergence of the Soros Network in Eastern Europe," in *Globalizing East European Art Histories: Past and Present*, eds. Beáta Hock and Anu Allas (New York: Routledge, 2018), 53–63.

general trend of “westernization” on the country’s cultural scene.¹⁵ The state virtually gave up controlling the cultural decision-making processes, which contributed to the formerly blacklisted artists gradually being allowed entry to the state institutions. Some of the progressive artists who were marginalized in the 1970s had more and more opportunities to exhibit in prominent state institutions; moreover, in 1986 these artists represented Hungary at the Hungarian Pavilion at the Venice Biennial.¹⁶

Regarding the situation of György Galántai and Artpool, the uncertainties of the Cold War cultural policy, influenced by the changing trends of the Soviet regime, were balanced by personal relations, semi-legal channels, and curatorial invitations. Already in the mid-1980s Galántai was invited to take part in museum group exhibitions. Included among these was the exhibition titled *Eklektika '85*, organized by Lóránd Hegyi in the Hungarian National Gallery, which provided an overview of progressive trends in painting through the art of several generations and *Digitart*, held in 1986 in the Museum of Fine Arts with Tibor Szentgyörgyi as its curator, which was the first digital art exhibition in Hungary. Moreover, a year later, he already had the opportunity to display his own project, his unique international “artistamp” collection at the Museum of Fine Arts. Like many other Eastern European artists, it was correspondence art and the mail art network where Galántai experienced the mentality that gave him the illusion of solidarity and equality between artists from East and West. He generated an extensive postal activity under the auspices of the Artpool brand and this served as the starting point for his international artistamp project titled *World Art Post*, a collection of the hundreds of artistamps, which he exhibited in 1982 at an exhibition organized at the Fészek Gallery.¹⁷

15 József Mélyi, “Rendszerváltás, 1983: A továbbélő nyolcvanas évek” (Political transition: The eighties living on) in “Lehetetlen realizmus” (Impossible Realism), eds. Emese Kürti, Csilla Markója, and István Bardoly, *Enigma* XXVI, no. 99. (2019 [2020]): 13–21.

16 *Art and Science*, 42nd Venice Biennale, June 29–September 28, 1986. Exhibitors: Imre Bak, Ákos Birkás, Károly Kelemen, István Nádler, national commissioner: Katalin Néray.

17 *Művészbélyegek. Mail art kiállítás Galántai György gyűjteményéből* (Artistamps: Mail art exhibition from György Galántai’s collection), Fészek Gallery, Budapest, April 6–25, 1982.

In 1987, Judit Geskó, who belonged to Miklós Erdély's Indigo Group¹⁸ and was a fledgling curator of the Museum of Fine Arts at the time, launched a series of exhibitions under the title *Contemporary Art in Hungarian Private Collections*. After its show devoted to ex-libris publications, she approached György Galántai in his capacity as an art collector and a mail art networker. It is important to note here that Judit Geskó's invitation took place only three years after Artpool's international mail art exhibition *Hungary Can Be Yours*, held in the Club of Young Artists, which is remembered as the last banned event before the political transition in Hungary. Ironically, the scandal linked to this event overshadowed the older fiasco, that of the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio. The curator of the Museum of Fine Arts, who had visited the exhibition at the Club of Young Artists back then, invited not Artpool but György Galántai to work with her on the museum project. This exhibition, titled *Stamp Images*, was the first large-scale project jointly realized by Artpool and the Museum of Fine Arts and the displayed material included works already present in the Artpool Archives as well as those submitted to a call announced specifically for this show. (fig. 7.2) The exhibition was a milestone in the history of Artpool in an infrastructural sense too, since it was the first time that a catalog and poster were made for their project from state funding. An important supplement to the story of cooperation between Artpool and the Museum of Fine Arts is that twenty years later, in 2007, *Stamp Images* was referred to as a precedent for the *ParaStamp* exhibition, which exhibited a new selection from Artpool's continuously expanding, internationally significant artiststamp collection.¹⁹

It can be accurately reconstructed from historical sources what a museum presence meant for Galántai in the 1980s and how his contemporaries in-

18 The Indigo group formed around Miklós Erdély was active from 1978 and 1986 in Budapest. Its name is a shortened form of INterDIszciplináris Gondolkozás (Interdisciplinary Thinking) and at the same time it refers to Miklós Erdély's favourite medium of drawing: carbon paper (*indigo* in Hungarian). The conceptual and intellectual spirit of the group relied on the essential ideas of the neo-avant-garde of the 1970s, the principles of collectivity and creativity. Among the members were artists and filmmakers like András Böröcz, Ildikó Enyedi, László Révész, János Sugár and János Szirtes. See the latest publication on Erdély's art pedagogy in a broader contextual framework: Dóra Hegyi, Zsuzsa László, and Franciska Zólyom, eds., *Creativity Exercises: Emancipatory Pedagogies in Art and Beyond* (Budapest: tranzit. hu; Leipzig: Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst; Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020).

19 *ParaStamp: Four Decades of Artiststamps from Fluxus to the Internet*, curator: György Galántai, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, March 23–June 24, 2007.

Figure 7.2: The participants of the “Stamp Images” exhibition with the curator at the colonnade of the Museum of Fine Arts, 1987.



Photo: András Rázsó. Courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center and György Galántai.

terpreted an underground institution, Artpool, being a partner of the museum system. A primary source in this respect is Galántai's own project, the *Homage to Vera Mukhina* performance (1980) realized in the environment of Museum of Fine Arts, on the Heroes Square during the visit of Italian mail art artist G. A. Cavellini. The performance was continued with a few events being staged in a museum interior, such as the photography action *Confrontation*, a walk through the Csók István Gallery in Székesfehérvár. During the performance Galántai and Klaniczay, “wearing” the history of art inscribed on their white clothes represented the timelessness of universal art contrasted with the restricted timeframe of socialist realism. (fig. 7.3) Compared with this approach, the two prominent institutions on Budapest's Heroes Square—the Museum of Fine Arts and the Múcsarnok/Kunsthalle—appeared as the opposite poles of the cultural past and the present in Galántai's concept. The old masters collection of the Museum of Fine Arts provided a kind of discursive distance as well as intellectual-political protection for Galántai against contemporary dilemmas. The spiritual space of the Museum of Fine Arts was

regarded by Galántai as the universal space of immanent culture, just like for some other contemporaries of his, for example Ákos Birkás,²⁰ who also found an intellectual refuge in the museum of international old masters. The museum's space was at times transformed into a venue for contemporary performances, such as in the case of Judit Kele's self-objectifying intervention titled *I Am a Work of Art* (1979–84), which was held in an exhibition hall of the Museum of Fine Arts.²¹

Figure 7.3: György Galántai, "Confrontation," photo action with Júlia Klaniczay at the exhibition titled "Hungarian Art of the Twentieth Century: The Fifties," Csók István Gallery, Székesfehérvár, 1981.



Photo: György Hegedűs. Courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center and György Galántai.

Although Galántai received the official invitation to the museum as a private individual and out of the curatorial ambition of Judit Geskó, his contem-

20 I am referring to Ákos Birkás' photo series titled *Kép és nézője* (Image and its viewer), 1977–79.

21 Manuscript documentation of Judit Kele's work; it was inserted into the shaping feminist discourses in Hungary by Beáta Hock in connection with the research and exhibition titled, *Agents and Provocateurs* (Contemporary Art Institute, Dunaújváros, October 16–November 20, 2009) and has survived in the Artpool archive.

Figure 7.4: Opening of the “Stamp Images” exhibition in the Museum of Fine Arts, 1987.



Photo: Júlia Klaniczay. Courtesy of the Artpool Art Research Center and György Galántai.

poraries evaluated it as a symbolic turning point that one of the founders of Artpool—whom even his friends from the Balatonboglár Chapel Studio had kept a careful distance from in the past—worked together with an institution at the top of the official hierarchy. (fig. 7.4) In the contemporary art discourse of the day the issue of the avant-garde and post-avant-garde entering the museum space was linked with the issue of rehabilitating the previously marginalized neo-avant-garde artists. The moral dilemma pertaining to this was expounded by Géza Perneczky, a member of the international mail art network living in Cologne, in the foreword to the *Stamp Images* exhibition catalog:

The state of mind of the “exhibiting artists” is ambivalent—one eye is crying, the other smiling. The above-described quasi-ideological background sends the clear message to mail art artists to *avoid* official exhibitions, money-oriented galleries and highly prestigious museums because they pose a threat to their independence. On the other hand, every mail art artist has expe-

rienced the humiliation endowed by the institutionalized art scene upon those stranded outside it.²²

The question was whose practice of legitimization was more effective: has the museum canon been eroded and opened itself up to contemporary art or has contemporary art broken down the walls of traditional institutions? The answer given to this question by contemporary critics was that they regarded Artpool's artistamp exhibition in the museum as the institution's progressive gesture and the sign of renewal.²³ According to the public consensus, this exhibition confirmed that a collection with a different approach than that of the established institution can positively affect its fixated cultural practice.

The exhibition in 1987 also illustrated the vast conceptual distance that existed in Hungary between the first and second public sphere and that transition between the two was far from being unproblematic. The positions that were accepted in the micro-sphere of the Hungarian underground scene lost their validity in the suddenly expanded publicity, where, due to the decades of marginalization and discontinuities, the achievements demanding great

22 Géza Perneczky, "Művészbélyegek" (Artistamps) in *Bélyegképek* (Stamp Images) exhibition catalog (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 1987), 2–19.
<https://artpool.hu/Artistamp/Perneczky.html>.

The exhibition was curated and the catalog compiled by Judit Geskó.

23 "The Museum of Fine Arts is exhibiting artistamps in its Graphic Cabinet with the title Stamp Images. It seems this institution looking back on a long history not only renovated its walls but can now renew its spirit. This is indicated by the display of György Galántai's (Artpool Archives) Stamp Images collection. In the past there was tension between the institutionalized arts and a good part of contemporary art trends, including Fluxus, whose participants chose to disassociate themselves from the former." György Szegő, "Bélyegképtár: Művészbélyegek és borítékok kiállítása" (Stamp library: An exhibition of artistamps and envelopes) *Magyar Nemzet*, July 6, 1987, 4. "Something like this would have been inconceivable in the 1970s. If somebody told me then that the respectfully old (what is more: too old) Museum of Fine Arts would organize an exhibition presenting one of the most recent contemporary art genres, mail art, or postal art, well, I would have wholeheartedly laughed at that person. [...] Of course the Museum of Fine Arts is not exhibiting its own collection but it has given the opportunity to an artist couple (or has it received an opportunity from them?), György and Júlia Galántai, in other words the Artpool 'art reservoir' to showcase some of the material resulting from their extraordinary collecting and documenting activity." György Szemadám, "Sivatagi művészposta: Bélyegképek a Szépművészeti Múzeumban" (Desert art post: Stamp images in the Museum of Fine Arts), *Fotó* 34 (1987): 499.

sacrifice could not be interpreted. Artpool, by then with many years of experience, represented a marginal art for which the mainstream art press did not find secure discursive reference points as they lacked the wide-ranging knowledge of the antecedents, tendencies, and media to help them find the right discursive links; nor were they able to provide critical interpretations for the represented artists' oeuvres. For decades the participants of the dominant mainstream culture lacked (or approached only negatively and/or parodied) those international references (Fluxus, conceptual art, performance art, experimental poetry, mail art, etc.) that meant a shared reference system for the majority of underground artists. The shortcomings of interpretations, which was emphasized by the critics in connection with the artistamp exhibition, reflected this afore-mentioned debt: the non-existent avant-garde canon.²⁴ Artpool's penetration of the museum space did not trigger instant change in the cultural discourse and the critical assessment of neo-avant-garde practices but it highlighted the problem that had prevailed in Hungarian art history practically for decades, even after the political transition.

Approaching the tenth anniversary of its foundation, Artpool's characteristics as an institution and the role it played in contemporary Hungarian culture became increasingly clear along with its binary situation, i.e. it was simultaneously present in the first and second tiers of publicity. When Géza Perneczky discussed the history of Artpool in the year of the political change in Hungary, he quoted the period around 1984 as the time when Artpool's process of institutionalization reached a turning point. In that period the

24 Julianna P. Szűcs, who took a consistently critical approach to the neo-avant-garde in all her critiques on the exhibition, wrote that the "post-modern" generation of the 1980s profited from the relaxed cultural policy and occupied the peak institutions of culture without this being preceded by a critical evaluation of the vanguard of the 1960s and the 1970s. According to her, this is one of the reasons why it was difficult to evaluate Galántai's achievement in 1987, when he leapt from the periphery to "Parnassus": "Something crucially important is missing between the art of the 1960s and 1970s, which was anti-avant-garde in many respects, and the supported art of the 1980s, which can be described in several respects as post-avant-garde art: the objective evaluation of the art trend, its dethronement or rehabilitation, which struggled with breathing problems in the past, for different reasons, and standing on the shoulders of which the 'posts' are so comfortably out of the water now." Julianna P. Szűcs, "Bélyegképek a Szépművészetiben" (Stamp Images in the Museum of Fine Arts) *Népszabadság*, June 30, 1987, 7.

Artpool Letter was already launched and “it was well received not only by alternative movements but became an integral part of the artistic public life in Hungary”²⁵; it informed its readers about the new media, theoretical debates, and microcosm of contemporary art while reconnecting Hungarian art with the international trends. Perneckzy described it as a kind of shift in Artpool’s profile when in the second half of the 1980s the focus of the archive’s collecting changed and greater emphasis was placed on local art events. He attributed it to this shift in focus that Artpool won financial support from the Soros Foundation, which also meant that, although Artpool did not become an official institution, it was one of the accepted semi-official enterprises. He claimed that this new focus helped Artpool’s cooperation with prominent museums, for which he cited the artistamp exhibition of 1987 as an example.²⁶ In the context of Artpool’s current institutional status and its final integration into the Museum of Fine Arts in 2015, Géza Perneckzy’s conclusion sound especially prophetic:

For outsiders this whole thing might seem like a strange hobby, an extravagant and curious pursuit. It is not easy to see that a new institution is coming into being and that a cultural institution serving the public interest is waiting to be discovered and taken possession of by society. [...] The collection, once treated as a hobby, has grown beyond its original framework, into an institution, and the day will come when its cataloging and maintenance cannot be funded with private resources.²⁷

Perneckzy’s statement sums up the main motive behind Artpool’s contemporary musealization: initially an underground archive and then, from the 1990s, a non-profit organization has grown beyond its framework and independent (i.e. small and flexible) institutional conditions. With the drastic cut in funds received from city of Budapest from mid-2000s, the operation of the archive with its material having reached more than 300 linear meters by then, became critical and the founders had to make a responsible choice in regard

25 Géza Perneckzy, “Az Art Pool gyűjtemény: Egy magyar művészeti gyűjtemény megszületése” (The Art Pool collection: The birth of a Hungarian art collection) *Művészet* 30 (1989): 8.

26 The first international artist book exhibition was organized in conjunction with Artpool with the title “Surprise... to our readers” between October 18 and December 7 in 1987 at the István Király Museum in Székesfehérvár.

27 Perneckzy, “Az Art Pool,” 5.

to the institution's future. After several years of negotiations, the Artpool Art Research Center first became one of the collection departments of the Museum of Fine Arts and since 2020 it has formed part of the Central European Research Institute for Art History, established within the framework of the museum. As could be seen, the restructuring of the archive was not merely necessitated by the difficulties of its operation and funding but it was also based on Galántai's concepts envisioned about its long-term future.

The most recent turn in Artpool's history has added it to the narrow circle of international art archives that survived the years of the regime changes in Eastern Europe. In this regard, perhaps the closest analogy to Artpool is the artist book collection of Guy Schraenen, a Belgian curator, the founder of the Archive for Small Press & Communication in 1974, which the Weserburg Museum in Bremen bought in 1999. Another example is the archives of the Polish KwieKulik artist couple, which was purchased by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw in 2011.²⁸ In both cases it was a crucial criterion of the musealization that the integrity of the collections be safeguarded, their archival profiles consistently confirmed and their autonomy granted in their relationship with the larger institutional framework.

In Artpool's case, the above was complemented with a challenge that was addressed already in 1987: the question of how the archive will be able to shape the museum's operation in a positive and future-oriented way. Moving away from its previous self-historicizing practice, Artpool can benefit from the historical, contextual, and methodological hybridity of the museum's intellectual space, while their cooperation should rest upon the principles and ethical code of knowledge-sharing archives. Besides the collecting and documenting activity in the classical sense, it is important to address the primary social context that surrounds the archive, while retaining the Active Archive concept that will ensure the augmentation of the archive and its presence on the contemporary art scene.

There is no doubt that Artpool's most important intellectual capital is its own past and its future is determined by the experimental and dissident artistic ethos of its legacy along with its continuous collaborations locally and internationally. American correspondence artist Ray Johnson, who was one of

28 For the in-depth discussion of KwieKulik archive, see Tomasz Załuski's chapter in this volume.

the main reference points in Artpool's history,²⁹ introduced the concept of "moticos" in the 1950s (the anagram of osmotic) to denote his irregular ink drawings, newspaper cutouts and collages. In György Galántai's interpretation, the symbolism of "moticos" is that they depict forms that do not resemble anything else but themselves. In the current dynamics and institutional environment of cultural reality, the legacy of the self-management practice of the Artpool-moticos can continue on the basis of collaborative contemporary critical practices.

29 Kornelia Röder, "Ray Johnson and the Mail Art Scene in Eastern Europe," in "Mythmaking Eastern Europe: Art in Response" ed. Mateusz Kapustka, special issue, *Kunsttexte.de, Ostblick* (2014/3), <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/8217/roeder.pdf>.

The Alternative Official?

KwieKulik's Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation as a State-Financed Performative Archive under Real Socialism

Tomasz Załuski

Pracownia Działań Dokumentacji i Upowszechniania (PDDiU)—the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation—was an authored, private, alternative artistic gallery formed and run by Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik, who lived and worked together as the KwieKulik duo in the 1970s and 1980s in socialist Poland.¹ PDDiU became—and today is widely known as—an exercise in artistic self-organization, self-documentation and self-historicization; an unofficial archive operating beyond established institutional systems. In the 1970s, it was housed in KwieKulik's private apartment in Warsaw (fig.8.1), and since the mid-1980s, it has been stored in Kulik's house in the nearby Łomianki. However, what the artists really wanted to create was a formalized art-and-research agency, which would work under the auspices of, or be part of, a state institution. Therefore, I would like to focus not so much on the actual activity of PDDiU as an authored neo-avant-garde gallery, but on the project, program and potential of PDDiU as a state-financed performative archive within an official institution. My text is not an exercise in counterfactual history but rather in what I am tempted to call a “potential history”: a history of what actually happened but only in the form of a potentiality. In addition, going beyond the highly indeterminate opposition of “official” vs “unofficial,” I will try to interpret the generative concept of PDDiU in terms

¹ For a comprehensive account of KwieKulik's artistic practice, see Łukasz Ronduda and Georg Schöllhammer, eds., *KwieKulik: Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, trans. Marcin Wawrzyńczak et al (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art; Wrocław: BWA Wrocław Galleries of Contemporary Art; Vienna: Kontakt; Warsaw: KwieKulik Archive, 2012).

of the “alternative official.” Basically, this term is supposed to show the embeddedness or active participation of experimental artists in the mechanisms of state art system under “real” or “actually existing socialism.” But it is also, more generally, meant to enable yet another step in the ongoing process of shifting the historiography of East European art of that period from the dominant political history paradigm—with its simplistic models of totalitarianism or post-totalitarianism, as well as a specter of a “dissident art” that still implicitly (mis)shapes our approaches to the art from the socialist bloc—towards the interpretative framework of socialist modernizations, complex and ambivalent as they were in their social, economic, political and cultural aspects. Accordingly, I will argue that behind the concept of PDDiU was an attempt to create a modernized institution of art production and propagation, aimed at social and cultural modernization, and that such an attempt needs to be analyzed not only within the context of new experimental artistic tendencies of the 1970s, but also in relation to structural changes to the official state art system in People’s Republic of Poland and state policies of cultural propagation.

A Drive for Institutionalization

The 1970s artistic practices of self-documenting, self-archiving and self-historicizing were part of what could be generally called the neo-avant-garde culture of self-determination. Polish artists, just like their neo-avant-garde colleagues elsewhere, wanted to produce, present, interpret, evaluate and propagate their art in their own terms and on their own terms. They were afraid that the existing state art infrastructures (galleries and museums; the Union of Polish Visual Artists with its sections dedicated to traditional artistic disciplines and media; exhibition commissioners, art critics and art historians, etc.) were not capable of recognizing the specificity of new experimental art, or were simply not willing to do so (for reasons of intra-milieu tensions and competition, a general cultural policy of the central government, etc.) and could misconstrue, misrepresent, and undervalue its ideas and practices. In effect, they not only preserved documents and testimonies of artistic life but also used their growing archives to produce their own narratives on this new art. Nevertheless, these self-produced archives and self-narrated histories of the neo-avant-garde were meant to be introduced into the mainstream institutional circuit. In art historical discourse it has become customary to set

Figure 8.1: Documentation slide show at the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation (PDDiU), KwieKulik's private apartment in Warsaw, 1976. From left: Andrzej Partum, Jiří Kovanda, Ivan Vacík, Paweł Kwiek, Maksymilian Dobromierz, Przemysław Kwiek.



Courtesy the of Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

up a dichotomy between “official” and “unofficial” art or artistic culture when discussing experimental art practices from socialist Central and Eastern Europe, but in the case of 1970s Poland, this opposition is hardly operative.² I propose to replace it with the conceptual pair of “mainstream” and “alternative,” where the former stands for conservative and moderate, and the latter

2 Even though socio-political, economic and cultural conditions of 1970s Poland were, in certain respects, different from those in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, such as Czechoslovakia, GDR, Hungary or Romania, I do not argue here for any “Polish exceptionalism” as regards the inoperativity of the opposition official/unofficial and the need to introduce concepts like the “alternative official.” On the contrary, I think that the latter concept—or other concepts that would go beyond the official/unofficial opposition—might prove useful when applied to cases like Jiří Valoch’s organizational and curatorial initiatives at Brno House of Arts and elsewhere, galleries of Students’ Cultural Centers in Yugoslavia or the Béla Balázs Studio in Budapest, to name just a few.

for experimental and modernizing. Mainstream and alternative artistic circuits were not separated from and opposed to each other, but co-existed in complex interrelationships as parts of the same socialist state art system. The neo-avant-garde used different administrative opportunities (mainly student and municipal or regional culture centers, etc.) to develop and expand an alternative circuit of the so-called “authored art galleries”; but also hoped and tried, with some success, to introduce their art, archives and self-narrations into the mainstream art circuit and in this way to transform and modernize it. These hopes and attempts at modernizing existing art institutions—or even creating new experimental ones from scratch—were legitimized by a new project of socialist modernization which was announced at the beginning of the 1970s by authorities of the Polish United Workers’ Party as Poland’s own “third way.”

It was precisely at that time that KwieKulik started to pursue the idea of institutionalizing ephemeral art production, documentation and propagation. Between 1971 and 1973, they were trying to carve out their own space at different institutions. They made efforts to gain employment at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw and establish an interdepartmental studio there, which was to invent new ways of organizing student work and co-operation, in order to set the direction for reforming and modernizing higher arts education in general.³ Together with Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski and Paweł Kwiek, the duo also made a proposal to the state TV station in Warsaw. They wanted to create a studio which would document, in video, ephemeral artistic activities across the whole country, build an archive of such materials to be used in various TV programs, and develop unconventional methods of editing documentary footage with TV equipment.⁴ Both the academy and the TV studios were conceived of here as experimental laboratories aimed at producing new practical knowledge and expertise. Due to this, the distribution of documentation and theoretical accounts of their activities in the form of presentations, projections, screenings, periodicals and books was also envisioned.

However, in social terms, the most radical project was to use a gallery space, part of the Sigma Club at the University of Warsaw, as an Experi-

3 Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, handwritten notes, August 1, 1971, and the beginning of 1973, KwieKulik archive.

4 Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski, Paweł Kwiek, proposal for a TV production submitted to state TV station in Warsaw (unpublished manuscript in Polish, March 20, 1972, KwieKulik archive).

tal Center for Developing Methods and Forms of Creative Activities in the Youth Milieus, or, in another version, Experimental Center for Propagating Art. It was to be established under the auspices of the Union of Polish Students, which would provide the funding. Together with Jan Stanisław Wojciechowski, Wiktor Gutt, and Waldemar Raniszewski, KwieKulik imagined an art research and social education center which would reform the very praxis of institutional art production and propagation. Evoking the idea of the scientific-technical revolution and new methods of work organization, they boldly claimed their right to revise “all existing forms and arrangements in the sphere of culture and art”⁵ and opted for modernization of institutions that propagate artistic culture. The imagined experimental “center” was to invent and develop alternative models of institutional practice to be implemented elsewhere. The models would not only be derived bottom-up from process-based artistic activities, and therefore better adjusted to their specificity, but they were also to be more effective in terms of audience engagement than traditional methods of cultural propagation. The main forms of new art propagation were to be direct, personal contacts with artists, extending from dialogues with them to the possibility of participation in their creative activities. Such an approach involved an expanded anthropological and sociological concept of art. The activities would be thematically linked to current social affairs and would generally focus on the question of human personality and the possibility of one’s self-realization within existing conditions. This would entail using existing forms of human relationships and creating new ones as elements of artistic activities, the participants in which would be “revealing themselves” thanks to their “being-in-common with one another.”⁶ KwieKulik planned to make trips to different locations across the country, enter various professional, social and class groups, perform artistic activities themselves as well as participate in other artists’ actions, and finally, make and present documentation of all workings, which would be taking place under the auspices of their “center.” The documentation was to be used in further art production and propagation activities and therefore it would form a performative, self-expanding archive.

5 Paweł Freisler, Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, application submitted to the Culture Committee of Polish Students’ Association (unpublished manuscript in Polish, February 14, 1972, KwieKulik archive). The text was subsequently reprinted and made public in *Notatnik Robotnika Sztuki*, no. 1 (January–March 1972), unnumbered pages.

6 Freisler et al., application.

Loops

When none of these projects met with approval and could be implemented, KwieKulik turned to other options. During the following years, they created three projects of PDDiU as an official institutional agency. Two of them were prepared in 1974, and the third one in 1977. The earlier two were based on experiences that KwieKulik had been gathering in their actual performative and archival practice since the end of the 1960s. They were more audience-oriented and they treated art as an experiment in social and cultural modernization, which was in line not only with the avant-garde idea of art as a medium of social change but also with official state policies of culture propagation as a means of social advancement. The third project, reflecting the shift that had taken place in KwieKulik's practice after 1974, focused entirely on artistic and art institutional issues.

In 1972, the Fund for Visual Arts Development was established as a program meant to provide state patronage and financial support for projects in the field of artistic culture. It was a means of developing and modernizing the state art system in Poland and was to introduce decentralization in funding and decision-making but also give more control over the system to the Union of Polish Visual Artists. In 1974 the board of the fund, which was dominated by prominent members of the union, announced its first call for applications. The fund was supposed to provide conditions for facilitating artistic creation and also help cultural and social education institutions with propagating art. It could also commission research work and the creation of program on art propagation from institutions and individuals. A promoted form of propagating—in fact, the only one available for grass-root artistic initiatives—was the establishment of an art gallery.⁷

In March 1974, KwieKulik applied to the board of the fund with their proposal of taking up “research on the theory and praxis of all types of documented activities, participatory and non-participatory.”⁸ They wanted to be given three-year funding for “performing necessary experiments and their analysis.”⁹ They also undertook to prepare annual presentations as a form of

7 “Fundusz Rozwoju Twórczości Plastycznej,” *Informator Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków* 23, no. 3 (March 1975): 2–8.

8 Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, Proposal for the board of the Fund for Visual Arts Development, (unpublished manuscript in Polish, March 9, 1974, KwieKulik archive).

9 Kulik and Kwiek, Proposal for the board.

reporting on the development of the project. Its final product would be a two-volume book in Polish and English *Sztuka działań—The Art of Activities*. Volume I would feature texts and volume II—images. A rough draft listed the following areas to be included in the book:

1. Activity as an exposed creative process;
2. Types of activities;
3. Techniques of registration (documentation) of activities;
4. Impact of activities on different social groups;
5. History of the Art of Activities movement in Poland;
6. Index of names of artists doing activities;
7. List of activities realized to date.¹⁰

In order to complete such an ambitious art-and-research task, KwieKulik needed an institutional supply base. They proposed, as a temporary measure, to give this base the form of an official “authored gallery.” Such a gallery was to support and “integrate artists who perform activities by giving them access to accommodation facilities and technical resources as well as to an archive with documentation materials and a library they all could use together.”¹¹ Activities conducted by invited artists would be documented by KwieKulik, and later used to prepare edited narrative projections and screenings for four types of audiences: political, cultural and educational activists; scientists; school pupils and university students; artists and art historians. The gallery would also document the workings of other art centers and spread information about the development of process-based art activities across the country and abroad. Finally, it would share its experience and expertise with the Union of Polish Visual Artists and art high schools and academies in Poland, advising them on the specificity of performing and documenting the art of activities. Since the authored gallery format was only a temporary measure, it was soon, after an initial development stage of three years, to be transformed in a department or section of a state institution.

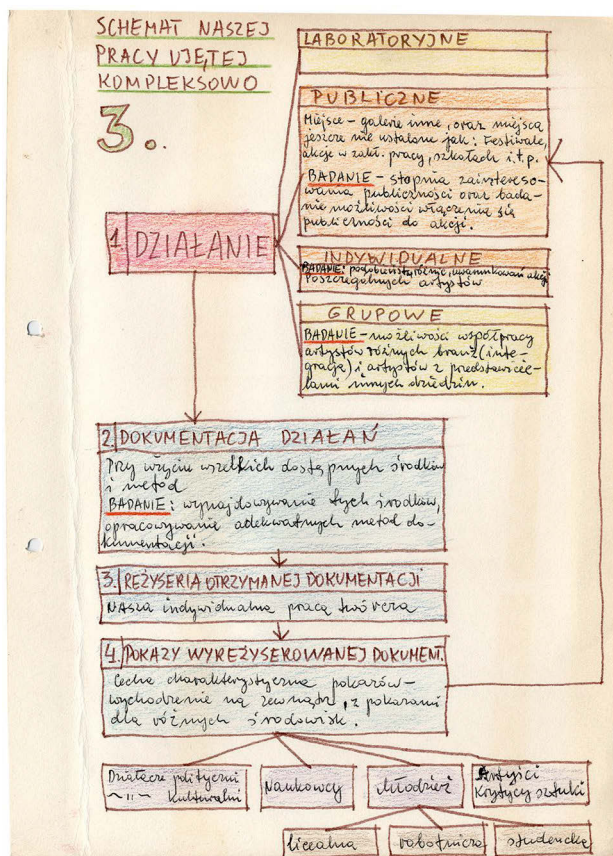
Another version of the same proposal was submitted to the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences.¹² It was a complete scheme of work

¹⁰ Kulik and Kwiek, Proposal.

¹¹ Kulik and Kwiek, Proposal.

¹² Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, “Do Instytutu Sztuki PAN” (unpublished manuscript, folder with handwriting and photographs of typed text pasted on the paper, 20 numbered pages and 18 unnumbered, April 1974, KwieKulik archive).

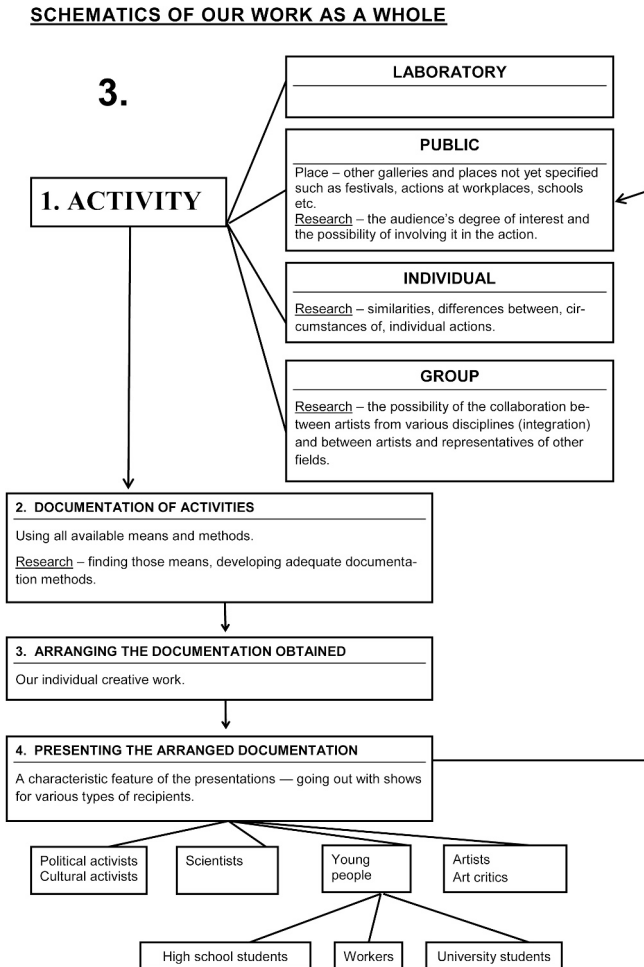
Figure 8.2: KwieKulik, flow chart of the work for the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation (PDDiU), excerpt from the proposal for the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences, 1975, and its English transcription.



Courtesy of the Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

of PDDiU as a new department at the institute. It involved performing activities, documenting them, editing and, finally, showing the edited documentation to the four aforementioned types of audiences, plus workers. All projects undertaken were to be experiments in developing new types of artis-

Figure 8.3: The English transcription of the flow chart.



Courtesy of the Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

tic activities and their documentation, as well as testing the possibilities of artistic co-operation and audience involvement. All new types of activities were to be analyzed, elaborated on and prepared for large-scale institutional implementation. This research-oriented aspect of the whole project was also stressed by the fact that the scheme took on the form of an algorithm and

was presented as a flow chart. (fig. 8.2–3) Drawing inspiration from the scientific-technical revolution, KwieKulik used here models provided by praxeology and cybernetics. The algorithm not only formalized the artists' activities but also gave them the form of a loop or, more precisely, cybernetic-like feedback loop. Public shows of edited documentation could themselves be a form of public activity and would involve audience participation. As such, they could become new artistic experiments, in which case they would entail new ways of documenting, produce new documentary materials to be edited and shown in public, and so on; it was here that the logic of the performative archive found its most explicit expression. In terms of further propagation of their research, KwieKulik wanted to publish the above-mentioned two-volume bilingual book, have their archival photographic documentation printed in the form of exhibition displays and organize several audio-visual performances based on edited archival documentation. They planned to create the scripts of these performances as well as copies of audio-visual elements and material props used in them so that they could be re-enacted by other people.¹³

Despite evaluations of the project, which were largely positive, KwieKulik did not manage to get state funding in 1974. They kept trying until 1977, when they re-applied to the Institute of Art with a modified concept of PDDiU. This time they concentrated on the most pressing artistic and institutional issues, forgoing the question of social participation. They wanted to get funding for the next three years, during which time they were supposed to be working through and sorting out the archive they had been building since the late 1960s as well as documenting current artistic activities. The duo planned to use their flat, which served as the actual PDDiU premises, and, in a typically (over)ambitious fashion, prepare there thirty individual and sixteen group meetings of artists who worked in the field of process-based activities, six thematic exhibitions and twenty-eight audio-visual shows which were to propagate the movement of the art of activities. They also wanted to publish, in Polish and English, three brochures with written documentation and the theory of the art of activities, a catalog of the above-mentioned exhibitions and shows, and a summary of the whole project with proposals on how ephemeral art should be methodically documented. These modernizing proposals were to be imple-

13 Kulik and Kwiek, *Do Instytutu Sztuki PAN*.

mented by art institutions.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the artists, again, did not manage to obtain funding. The same thing happened yet another time at the beginning of the 1980s, when they were applying in vain to several different state institutions in Warsaw with a reduced version of the last PDDiU project. Given this, the notion of “loops,” which I have used as the title of this subchapter, refers not only to the cybernetic-like feedback structure of PDDiU archive but also to KwieKulik’s going-in-circles while wrestling with bureaucracy and conflicting interests of different agents within the state art system.

Competing Modernizations

The question remains why KwieKulik did not succeed in their efforts to establish PDDiU as an alternative-yet-official state-financed institution that was to develop models of modernizing artistic, social and institutional practice. The reasons for this were complex and overdetermined but one factor might have played a decisive role. The Polish state art system in 1970s, acting in line with protocols of party and central government policy, was generally directed towards social and institutional “modernization.” The Union of Polish Visual Artists put forward its own program of conservative or moderate modernization, which included, for example, the concept of art as a means of designing and “humanization” of industrial and urban spaces, and the idea of establishing new institutions dedicated to the presentation and documentation of “contemporary visual arts,” the term being understood as encompassing all current artistic production.¹⁵

14 Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, “Harmonogram działalności od maja 77 do czerwca 80 r.” (unpublished manuscript, April 8, 1977, KwieKulik archive). The handwritten draft of this schedule shows even more ambitious plans, which included publishing a quarterly information bulletin in Polish and English; conducting domestic and foreign correspondence as a means of propagating one’s own art and seeking international co-operation; systematic documentation of the activities by selected groups of artists; self-education—improving foreign languages skills; and finally, tracking domestic and foreign literature on the art of activities—Zofia Kulik, Przemysław Kwiek, remarks for the meeting at the Institute of Art (unpublished manuscript in Polish, handwritten notes, March 31, 1977, KwieKulik archive).

15 These and other issues which were parts of the union’s modernization program (e.g. pension insurances for artists, increasing the number of artists’ studios in different cities around the country, reduction of tax on works sold abroad, rules for appointing and executing commissions, etc.) were widely covered through the 1970s in the two

It seems that the program was partly based on appropriation of certain progressive ideas, concepts and grass-root initiatives developed by Polish experimental art milieus at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s, and on giving them much more moderate forms. The union appeared, for example, to be trying to intercept the very concept of “the authored gallery,” take over the management and funding of already existing authored galleries and create new ones that would not only present all current art production, including more traditional media and styles, but also function as commercial spaces where artists could sell their works.¹⁶ A similar situation can be seen with the idea of creating a center responsible for art documentation and information. KwieKulik were not the first, nor the only one among experimental art milieus in Poland to create a project proposing such an agency. An earlier attempt to implement a similar—but less radical—idea was made by art critic Jerzy Ludwiński, who established the Center for Art Documentation in 1972 in Wrocław and, together with Zbigniew Makarewicz, managed to run it for a year.¹⁷ By the mid-1970s, the union had intercepted the idea of creating an art documentation and information center, modified it to include and promote more moderate and conservative artistic practices and put it high on its agenda. The union clearly wanted to oversee the process of establishing the institution and shape its program.

However, the Ministry of Culture and Art, formally responsible for new investments in the institutional field of art, apparently had its own interests in establishing and controlling such an institution. In 1974, during the 14th Congress of the Union of Polish Visual Artists in Lublin, the delegates

journals published by the union: *Biuletyn Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków* (in 1974 renamed as *Biuletyn Rady Artystycznej Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków*) and *Informator Zarządu Głównego Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków*.

16 See Maciej Gutowski, “Wystawy i galerie,” *Biuletyn Rady Artystycznej ZPAP* 117, no. 4 (1974): 15–8.

17 The Center for Art Documentation was opened as a first step towards establishing a more complex art institution called the Center of Artistic Research, an experimental space for art practices, documentation, information and propagation. Unfortunately, it was never created. See Jerzy Ludwiński, “Center for Artistic Research: Program,” [1971] in *Notes from the Future of Art: Selected Writings of Jerzy Ludwiński*, trans. Katarzyna Bójarska et al, ed. Magdalena Ziółkowska (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, Veenman Publishers, 2008): 132–137; Zbigniew Makarewicz, “Polish Art in the West: Jerzy Ludwiński in Wrocław,” in *Jerzy Ludwiński: Filling the Blanks = Wypełniając puste pola*, exhibition catalog, ed. Piotr Lisowski, Katarzyna Radomska (Toruń: Center of Contemporary Art Znaki Czasu, 2011): 82–3.

demanded that the ministry should establish a “national center for contemporary visual art documentation and information.”¹⁸ The next year, at the 5th Session of the Artistic Board of the Union of Polish Visual Artists, where various proposals for such centers were presented, a representative of the ministry clearly stated that there were no budget plans to create such a national center until the end of the decade.¹⁹ At the same time, she did not rule out the possibility of funding smaller projects of that kind. In the following years, the union were trying to establish just such a small documentation center as part of different existing institutions. However, like KwieKulik, they also failed.

Finally, at the turn of the 1970s and 1980s, the Ministry of Culture and Art made its own plan to create an institution that would be devoted to both exhibiting contemporary art and documenting it.²⁰ It was formally established under the name of the Center for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle in 1981, but it did not really start to organize exhibitions until the late 1980s. On the other hand, as early as 1985, a section of the institution started to operate, which was called the Center for Information and Documentation of Contemporary Art.²¹ Its aim was to collect documents of artistic life, build an archive and a publicly accessible database with information about artists, works, art institutions, exhibitions, and other events, art history writing, criticism and journalism. It was also to pursue plans to establish an advanced, unified, countrywide computer system, which would not only be a database of archival documentation stored at the institution, but also operate as a metainformation system coordinating documentation databases created by other Polish art galleries, museums and research institutes. Due to economic, technical and

18 “XIV Zwyczajny Zjazd Delegatów ZPAP,” *Informator Związku Polskich Artystów Plastyków* 13, no. 4 (April 1972): 3.

19 Kwiek and Kulik had not been invited to the meeting but the representative of the ministry mentioned their project of the Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation during the discussion—see Elżbieta Zawistowska, “V sesja Rady Artystycznej ZPAP w Łodzi. Dyskusja,” *Biuletyn Rady Artystycznej ZPAP* 120, no. 3 (1975): 24–5.

20 See Karol Sieniewicz, “Without the Proverbial Pomp and Circumstance: The Beginnings of the Center for Contemporary Art and the Cultural Policy of the State,” in *Rejected Heritage: Polish Art of the 1980s* (Warsaw: Museum of Modern Arts, 2011), 56–71.

21 In 1997, the section was renamed as the Center for Scientific Information and Documentation. It continued to operate until 2016, when it stopped collecting paper documents for the archive it had managed to build and, together with the library and multimedia collection, it formed a new unit at the institution called the Media Center.

organizational problems, the plans, put forward in 1986–87 and reformulated in 1991, were never realized.²²

The End of an Odyssey: Institutionalization of KwieKulik's Archive

After 1989, when the political transformation in Poland began, some major public art institutions in Poland started to turn to the ethos of the 1970s and 1980s alternative gallery movement, taking its specific mode of production and performance as the reference point for their new identity, exhibition policy and collection building strategy. One of the most prominent cases was the Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, which under the directorship of Wojciech Krukowski attempted to institutionalize the ethos of the neo-avant-garde and the entire alternative gallery movement of the 1970s and 1980s, to take over its symbolic capital as its own “inheritance,” and become the depository and owner of the documentation of artistic ideas and activities it generated. Taking advantage of this policy, several attempts were made to involve the institution in preserving, working through, sorting out and presenting KwieKulik's archive but they were mostly unsuccessful. In early 1990s, the aforementioned section of the Ujazdowski Castle devoted to contemporary visual art documentation and information started to gather and, in some cases, buy artists' archives. Among those bought in 1991 was a documentation “album” prepared by Przemysław Kwiek and Zofia Kulik with photographs of their selected past activities as a duo. The institution also established a long-term program called Document Gallery, which, between 1991 and 1998, presented archival documents of Polish neo-avant-garde and post-neo-avant-garde artistic culture of the 1970s and 1980s. However, these were small displays of documentary materials that were located—both symbolically and spatially—on the fringe of the main exhibition program of the institution. The archives did not yet have the status of fully-fledged exhibition objects, which could exist alongside “proper” artworks, enter into a dialogue

22 More on the program of the Centre for Information and Documentation of Contemporary Art at the Ujazdowski Castle—see Tomasz Załuski, “Galeria Wschodnia—A Biography of the Place,” in *Galeria Wschodnia: Dokumenty 1984–2017 / Documents 1984–2017*, ed. Daniel Muzyczuk and Tomasz Załuski (Łódź: Fundacja In Search Of... and Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi, 2019): 344–48.

with them, build their context, or even—replace them.²³ What could have contributed to changing this institutional habitus at the Ujazdowski Castle was a huge retrospective exhibition of KwieKulik's works and archive, curated by Jerzy Truszkowski, which the institution agreed to organize in 1997. Unfortunately, due to budget cuts, the show was called off. A final attempt was made in 2002, when a project of digitizing and historicizing the archive under the auspices of the Ujazdowski Castle was proposed by Zofia Kulik, but it was dropped by the institution before it really started.

Around the year 2000, after distancing herself from KwieKulik's agenda and earning international recognition for her individual artistic career, Zofia Kulik engaged once again in working on the duo's archive and preparing its items for presentation. She began scanning slides, photographs, and paper documents from the archive and using them to make narrative sets: photographic installations, display boards and digital emulations of slide projections. She presented these archival materials at different art galleries or museums in Poland and abroad, as she wanted to intervene in an ongoing process of institutionalization and historicization of 1970s and 1980s Polish neo-avant-garde art. In this way, she countered certain official and canonical narratives with the story of the phenomenon as seen and rewritten from her own perspective, which was that of an insider, a witness and an "ambassador of the past." (fig. 8.4)

This continuous, long-term effort led to the active involvement of a few institutional subjects, including the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw, which invested their financial, infrastructural and human capitals into the sorting out, digitization and presentation of a major part of the archive in the form of the monograph *KwieKulik: Zofia Kulik & Przemysław Kwiek*, published in 2012.²⁴ The museum also bought KwieKulik's original archival collection. Its items will be placed in the new building of the institution, which is currently (as of October 2020) under construction, and they will be presented there in a

23 In Poland the transformations that led to an institutional re-evaluation of the role of art documentation, artistic self-archivization, self-historicization and self-presentation practices, as well as artists' archives themselves, took place in the first and second decade of the twenty first century. These included the appearance of such phenomena as the "archival turn" in global contemporary art, new curatorial ideas and practices, especially contextual approaches to constructing exhibitions, and processes of institutional historicization of the 1970s and 1980s art.

24 Ronduda, *KwieKulik*.

Figure 8.4: Zofia Kulik, “Ambasadorowie przeszłości (Ambassadors of the Past): Made in GDR, USSR, Czechoslovakia and Poland,” 2006.



Digital photomontage, 210 × 81 cm. Courtesy of the Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation.

separate room as a permanent exhibition-installation authored by Zofia Kulik. In addition, digitized versions of all archival items will be made available online. But even as part of the museum collection, the archive is still considered a copyrighted artwork and it will retain some of its active and generative potential. Kulik and Kwiek will retain the right to use digital copies of all the archival items in order to make—and possibly sell, under the name of KwieKulik—double-dated new prints of documentary photographs or digital reconstructions of historical slide projections, as well as include the items into their respective current artistic production.²⁵

25 This strategy makes sure that the integrity of the original archive is preserved, while conforming strictly with the artistic ideas of KwieKulik and the way the duo used the archive. In the 1970s and 1980s, Kulik and Kwiek considered it as a “bank” from which they selected slides for their directed, narrative slide-shows. After the show, the slides were returned to the “bank” of archival materials. Contemporary digital technology

The potential commodification and economic exploitation of the archive stems from the fact that the ongoing archival work undertaken by Kulik requires constant financial outlays. Still, occasional sales of new editions of archival items cannot cover all the costs, as spending on the archive has significantly exceeded the proceeds it generates.²⁶ Therefore, the necessary funds come, to a large extent, from the sale of Kulik's solo works and from external public grants, raised by the Kulik-KwieKulik Foundation, an NGO started in 2016 and defined as a "continuation of the idea of the *Studio of Activities, Documentation and Propagation* as well as Zofia Kulik's long-time archival practice."²⁷ Its mission is not only to provide funds for the current work, research and education on the archive and its contents but also to provide for the future upkeep of Kulik's house in Łomianki and for turning this informal "living museum" into a formal institution dedicated to the work of Kulik and Kwiek. When this is accomplished, it will be a final symbolic testament to the artists' drive for self-determination and self-institutionalization.

makes it possible to preserve any visual narrative built on the basis of the KwieKulik archive materials as a discrete work.

26 Author's conversation with Zofia Kulik, February 2018.

27 KwieKulik Foundation website, accessed June 16, 2018, <http://kulikzofia.pl/o-fundacji/>

The Life and Afterlife of the Archive

Ewa Partum's and VALIE EXPORT's Archives

Karolina Majewska-Güde

Introduction

Artistic archives and the archival processes occurring within them are an essential part of historical and contemporary artistic practices and are theorized, historicized, and presented in a variety of ways. The latest approach understands artistic archives as a product of both their holdings and their usage,¹ paying attention to the production of processual knowledge within various complementary operations consisting of updating and reconfiguring the artistic archive, and emphasizing the continuousness of these processes.²

This paper combines a problem-oriented approach—an emphasis on artistic archives understood as transforming and transformative apparatuses—with a comparative method. The comparison of the artistic archives of Ewa Partum and VALIE EXPORT does not merely aim to uncover their correspondences or to understand them against one another but rather tries to rearticulate the specificities and differences between these hybrid and media-invested artistic practices. It must be emphasized that within this comparative transnational approach the artistic archives, despite having been created in two different sociopolitical contexts, are brought together. Taking into account contextual differences in relation to the development of these artistic practices in the socialist East and the “former” West, as well as their political and economic interdependencies, it is necessary to narrow down the field of comparison and to ask questions that are as specific as

1 Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer, “Introduction,” in *Fluid Access: Archiving Performance-Based Arts*, eds. Barbara Büscher and Franz Anton Cramer (Hildesheim: Olms, 2017), 61–65, 63.

2 Büscher and Cramer, “Introduction,” 62.

possible. When comparing the archives, I focus on the problem of the archive as a switch between public and private spheres not by analyzing documents in which “the private and professional are inseparable”³ but by looking at the strategies of instituting the archives and their passage toward afterlife within Ewa Partum’s and VALIE EXPORT’s artistic practices.

The title of this paper references Peter Osborne’s essay’s title: “Archive as Afterlife and Life of Art,” which deals with the issue of the postconceptual ontology of contemporary art.⁴ Osborne focuses his attention on the ontological homogenization of an art object and its documentation, which implies an extended concept of the archive that he defines as an intrinsic part of a contemporary artwork. He emphasizes that postconceptual “work includes its own documentation and, to the extent that it proliferates and its materializations are collected, its own archive as well.”⁵

Artistic archives analyzed here have been generated within the practices that can be understood as postconceptual in the sense proposed by Osborne. However, I would like to move a step away from a discussion of an artwork and consider instead the “life and afterlife” of the archive—not to examine its ontological status but to define modes of its existence within contemporary art infrastructures. My understanding of art infrastructures follows the proposition formulated by Irit Rogoff to think of infrastructure beyond the limits of material and administrative constraints and to conceptualize it as productive rather than restrictive:⁶ as not only something that facilitates delivery but as “a set of protocols that bind and confine us.”⁷

3 Beatrice von Bismarck, “Arena Archive; Artistic Self-Archiving: Processes and Spaces,” in *Interarchive: Archivarisches Praktiken und Handlungsräume im zeitgenössischen Kunstfeld* = *Interarchive: Archival Practices and Sites in the Contemporary Field of Art*, eds. Beatrice von Bismarck, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hans-Peter Feldmann, Diethelm Stoller, and Ulf Wuggenig (Cologne: König, 2002), 456–460, 457.

4 Peter Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition: Critical Essays* (London: Verso, 2018), 123–31.

5 Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, 129. Osborne also writes about an incompleteness of the reduction of the social objectivity of works and documents to the image in the current digital regime, arguing that in such cases their afterlife is their life.

6 This is a quotation from “Infrastructure,” a keynote lecture delivered by Irit Rogoff during the Former West project’s research congress Documents, Constellations, Prospects, which took place March 18–24, 2013, at Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin. A recording of the lecture is available at: <http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/Infrastructure>.

7 Keller Easterling describes infrastructures as something that have a capacity and currency not of text but rather of software: “an operating system that makes certain things

Within this theoretical framework I consider two modes of existence of the artistic archive, appropriating and extending the metaphor formulated by Osborne. These modes do not have to be temporally separated and can form a single continuum. The *life of the archive* considers its becoming and forming, or its making, by the artist and her collaborators. The life of the archive concerns, therefore, a multilayered processes of translations: from notes/models to an artwork/art project, from an artwork to documentation, from documentation and remains into an archive. It also considers archival philosophy inscribed implicitly and explicitly in the artistic processes and processual knowledge produced within and during these processes. Stage two, the *afterlife of the archive*, does not imply lifelessness of stored documents, as Derrida's metaphor of "house arrest," but instead concerns all processes of instituting artistic archives. This comprises all the moments in which the archive physically and discursively enters the public domain—through exhibitions, presentations, and institutions. Thus the afterlife is the life of the archive in the future perfect, or an exercise in its constant potentialization.

By juxtaposing the artistic archives of Ewa Partum and VALIE EXPORT, I would like to examine topics that can be defined as specific to these artistic practices and the modes of their historicization and institutionalization but that can also be perceived as general issues pertinent to wider artistic archival discourses. They include the problem of the artistic archive understood as a liminal space, or a switch within art infrastructure between private and public spheres, and the practice of maintenance understood as constitutive for the life and "liveness" of the archive, especially in relation to ephemeral, action, and performance art. Other specific issues involve investigation into declared and undeclared disposition of both archives. Whereas the first two topics are self-explanatory, and will be discussed in more detail later, the last two terms need a brief explanation.

Archives are constituted through a set of strategies and decisions that, taken together, establish an archive's "active story."⁸ In the case of artistic archives, it is implicitly a curated vision of the practice: a declared story told by the *archon*, who is an artist. Still, the archive is not sealed, it is porous; it contains links to other archives and to other narratives and serves several

possible and other things impossible." Keller Easterling, *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space* (London: Verso, 2014), 12.

8 See also Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 70.

undeclared functions, especially once it is opened to users in its afterlife. Undeclared disposition of the archive can, for instance, indicate “a degree of the faith in the evidence of the document.”⁹ Keller Easterling, defining the undeclared disposition of infrastructure, writes that

some of the most consequential political outcomes of infrastructure remain undeclared in the dominant stories that portray them. Information resides in the technologies [...] as well as in the declared intent or story [...]. Yet information also resides in a complex of countless other factors and activities. All these activities, taken together, lend the organization some other agency or capacity—a disposition—that often escapes detection or explanation.¹⁰

Within the archival discourse, the undeclared disposition is described as specific to artistic archives as well as to artistic operations within and around the archive. Referring to Hal Foster’s famous essay “An Archival Impulse,” Henk Slager argues that “by focusing on unacknowledged and repressed qualities, artistic archives show the essence of the archive as *found yet constructed, factual yet fictive, public yet private* [emphasis mine].”¹¹ Here, I am interested in the way in which the artist’s archive realizes or performs the latter condition of being public and private at the same time.

My approach to the material gathered in both Partum’s and EXPORT’s archives is inspired by recent feminist art historiography that reconsiders archives as places of collaboration and as multi-authored entities.¹² I am interested in historicizing artistic archives as constituted through archival and artistic perspectives. The artistic gaze can be defined as one that enables the ontological homogenization of artistic work and its archive. It implies a circular time of the ongoing medial transformations. Archival artefacts understood as outcomes of these constant transformations “generate new methods of appropriation and discursive exploration”¹³ to those related to the object of reference, for instance, live performance or artistic action. Within the artistic gaze, material in the archive is pragmatically separated into different registers

9 Bismarck, “Arena Archive,” 457.

10 Easterling, *Extrastatecraft*, 71.

11 Henk Slager, *The Pleasure of Research* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2015), 82.

12 See, for instance, Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, eds., *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017).

13 Büscher, “Introduction,” 63.

(documentary and artistic) once it enters the public domain through institutions such as exhibitions, museums and publications. The archival gaze, on the other hand, indicates linear temporality that makes it possible to separate material on the basis of its production before and after the actual work of art or past event. There are things, processes, and labor that *led to* and *followed* the artwork. A historicizing gaze, which I try to exercise here, considers both the artistic and archival gazes simultaneously in their reciprocity and their declared and undeclared dispositions.

Why Juxtapose the Archives of These Two Artistic Practices?

There are several parallels between the artistic biographies and practices of Ewa Partum and VALIE EXPORT, and although they did not occupy any of the same institutional spaces until 1989, there are certain temporal resonances between them that go back to the beginnings of the lives and artistic work of both artists. Let me just briefly outline some pivotal dates on their respective timelines. Both artists were born in the same decade—VALIE EXPORT in 1940 and Ewa Partum in 1945—and they share certain generational experiences of postwar childhood and growing up in a period of socialist and capitalist modernizations. In 1967 they both adopted their artistic names—Ewa Partum by marrying a fellow artist, Andrzej Partum, and VALIE EXPORT by inventing her artistic pseudonym. There are other surprising biographical parallels: both artists attended textile schools in their youth and both worked at potboiler jobs in the film industry.¹⁴ The institutions that deal with their artistic legacies came to life at almost the same time: in 2015/16 the VALIE EXPORT Center (VEC) was established in Linz and opened to researchers and visitors in 2017. In 2016 Ewa Partum founded the ARTUM Foundation, ewa partum museum, in the Polish countryside near the Polish-German border.

The similarities of Partum's and EXPORT's artistic strategies and positions within national art histories cannot be denied. At the core of their various artistic projects is the processuality and in their work emphasis is placed "on the event's medial interlining and temporality rather than its materialization as an immutable object."¹⁵ Both artists deployed their bodies and po-

14 This can tell us a lot about possible positions and professional choices of creative women on both sides of the "Iron Curtain."

15 Büscher, "Introduction," 61.

larized the public in provocative guerrilla-style feminist actions in the 1970s and '80s. They share an understanding of feminist art not merely in terms of feminist content and effects, but also as an emancipatory attitude toward art formats, mediums, and conventions.

In her performances in the 1970s and '80s, Partum used her naked body as a tool of her feminist politics, which referenced and criticized the visual tradition of the disinterested body by denouncing its universalism as an ideological and historical construct. EXPORT, on the other hand, operating "in terminologies of psychoanalysis, surrealism and the inner spaces of poetry," concerned her work with the projection of the female body as a "double," "as something absent, vanishing, decorporealized, in a struggle against the male 'real.'"¹⁶

The beginnings of their artistic archives can be traced to the 1960s. Both archives contain reference material relevant to the making and reception of Ewa Partum's and VALIE EXPORT's respective art, allowing us to register the continuance and transformation of their works. In addition to accumulation and preservation, the artists reuse the materials, reintroducing them into circulation at certain intervals and subsequently returning them to the archives. Moreover, both artistic archives are used by the artists as tools of self-positioning—and they represent Ewa Partum and VALIE EXPORT not merely as artists but as multifaceted networking and cross-linked cultural producers: Partum as a curator, publisher, and organizer, and EXPORT as a researcher, theorist, curator, and academic educator.

However, what prompted me to start this research was the fact that the "backstages" of these seemingly correlated practices and their infrastructural settings do not correspond; they represent two different approaches to constituting and handling archives. The size, structure, scope, operating logic, arrangement, accessibility, disposition, and organizational principles of the two archives are utterly different. This difference gave rise to the question about new ways to address the shared genealogies of both practices and new possible ways of reading them together in their differences.

16 Sabine Folie, "Prologue to Script," in *VALIE EXPORT: Der virtuelle Körper. Vom Prothesenkörper zum postbiologischen Körper* = *VALIE EXPORT: The Virtual Body. From the Prosthetic to the Post-biological Body*, eds. Sabine Folie and Marius Babias (Cologne: König, 2020), 24; produced by the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz in cooperation with the Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (n.b.k.).

There is also one more reason to juxtapose the archives of the two artistic practices; looking at these practices from the perspective of their archives might enable us to de-link them in order to re-link them in a more horizontal way. Due to the political dynamic related to the East-West divide, one of the practices became a model for reading the other one. If the art of VALIE EXPORT gradually gained international recognition after an initial phase of rejection in a West-centric art world, Ewa Partum's art was "rediscovered" and redistributed at the end of the 1990s within the globalized art world, which is still characterized by hierarchies and subdivisions into central and marginal locations. As a result, Partum's early work was initially conveyed through existing narratives on feminist art, as the rereading of her practice for secondary audiences was done through the lens of existing feminist works and within contemporary theoretical frameworks such as global feminisms.¹⁷ Can re-visiting these archives in a different temporal order, i.e., synchronically, change the way we are told about these artistic practices?

If we agree that "archival material precedes and disrupts historiographical practice, holding *information* in excess of narratives yet to be written,"¹⁸ then we can assume that synchronously looking into both archives and cross-visiting them can allow a certain cross-fertilization that consequently would enable a productive reencounter with both practices: a critical reexperience of these artistic practices. These presuppositions are in line with the vision of

17 The first readers revisiting Ewa Partum's archive, Angelika Stepken and Gisliind Nabakowski, to a certain extent used VALIE EXPORT's practice as a model for the interpretation of Partum's works. Nabakowski, who is the author of the first comprehensive historical analysis of Partum's work, starts her essay with a quotation from EXPORT's text "The Real and Its Double: The Body" published in 1988. Gisliind Nabakowski, "Apprehension and Masquerade: 'Letter Millionaire'—Ewa Partum's Path to Conceptual Poetry and Feminist Gender Theory," in *Gedankenakt ist ein Kunstakt: Ewa Partum 1965–2000*, exhibition catalog, ed. Angelika Stepken (Karlsruhe: Badischer Kunstverein, 2001). The English translation of Nabakowski's text is a shortened version of her longer German essay published in the same catalog. See "Das Unbehagen an der Maskerade: Ewa Partums Weg als 'Buchstabenmillionärin' zur konzeptuellen Poesie und zur feministischen Gender-thematik," 110–29.

18 Paul Clarke, Simon Jones, Nick Kaye and Johanna Linsley, "Introduction: Inside and Outside the Archive," in *Artists in the Archive: Creative and Curatorial Engagements with Documents of Art and Performance*, eds. Paul Clarke, Simon Jones, Nick Kaye, and Johanna Linsley (New York: Routledge, 2018) 11–24, 13.

the archive as a site of permanent potentiality, as a place of “constant potentialization.”¹⁹

In the following section, I would like to bring to the fore some pivotal moments of transference from the life to the afterlife of Ewa Partum’s and VALIE EXPORT’s archives, in which the artists renegotiated the boundaries and limits of the archives in relation to the private-public divide.

Ewa Partum: The Space between Private and Institutional

Ewa Partum worked on the archive of her own artistic practice—accumulating, producing, and reproducing visual and discursive materials but also, already in the early 1970s, working with the idea of the archive in the framework of her Galeria Adres (“Address Gallery”), presenting collected materials at exhibitions—as an archive (fig. 9.1). Galeria Adres, created by the artist in Łódź in 1972, was an archive-generating machine through which Partum self-historicized her own practice.

The transition between materials related to Galeria Adres and documentation of Partum’s own practice is quite smooth. Partum’s archive includes material generated in Poland in the 1970s and taken to West Berlin in 1982, when she left Poland with a one-way ticket; material from that period which remained in Warsaw, however, went missing. A large batch of material was also created in the 1980s, a decade in which Partum’s artistic practice functioned as physically located in West Berlin but virtually de-localized, still suspended in the art infrastructures of the Polish art world. A great amount of material was created in the process of a redistribution, on the occasion of new exhibitions and installations after 1989. The impulse of self-archivization did not, in Partum’s case, generate a rigid order or system of care to preserve

19 Bart De Baere, “Potentiality and Public Space: Archives as a Metaphor and Example for Public Culture,” in Bismarck et al., *Interarchive*, 105–12, 111. De Baere argues that “Constant potentialization as a goal liberates archives from their false identification with the past by transforming their receptivity into infrastructure, by seeing it as a permanent part of their work, which is also liberating with regard to any pressure to keep up to date. Archives are the presenters of a possible image in which past, present, and future are a continuum.”

Figure 9.1: Exhibition of the Galeria Adres archives at the Survey of Documentation of Independent Galleries at the Galeria Repassage, Warsaw, 1973–74.

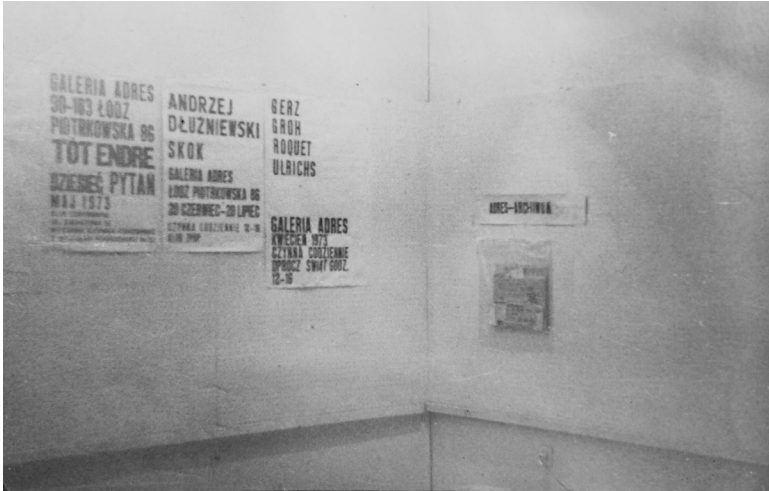


Photo © Courtesy of Ewa Partum, ARTUM Foundation, and ewa partum museum.

documents: the archive is fragmentary and fluid, formed “in the spirit” of the avant-garde tradition of radical reduction.²⁰

In recent years, the Ewa Partum Archive has become a place of intergenerational exchange and production of histories, primarily written in accordance with the recurring model of development, loss, and return as described by Clare Hemmings in her book *Why Stories Matter*, which explores narrative models of the history of Western feminism,²¹ or in accordance with its regional East–Central European variation, the paradigm of interrupted histo-

20 See Boris Groys, “The Weak Universalism,” *e-flux* 15 (April 15, 2010), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61294/the-weak-universalism/>. Groys writes, in the context of the historical avant-garde, “This radical reduction of artistic tradition had to anticipate the full degree of its impending destruction at the hand of progress. By means of reduction, the artists of the avant-garde began to create images that seemed to them to be so poor, so weak, so empty, that they would survive every possible historical catastrophe.”

21 Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

ries. Partum's retrospective exhibitions²² and accompanying publications can be described as the moments of a transformation of her artistic archive. The temporality of this kind of retroactive art history is a dynamic time of returning to the past and updating for the present, while the temporality of (and in) the archive is a duration related to the practice of maintenance,²³ to time without a vector, connected with everyday life. The place where Ewa Partum's artistic archive functions is also connected with everyday life. It is not the institutional space of a professional studio, but rather a private living space: a semiotic and spatial context evoking specific associations. It is a place of transformation, of continuous circulation of documents and notation: moving toward becoming and also in the opposite direction—toward entropy. It is a liminal space in which things and documents pass from the private sphere to the realm of art history; they change their status from missing to found, and also from documentary to artistic.

Ewa Partum's action *Non-Exhibition: Curators. Between Institutionalality and Privacy* (Nie-wystawa: Kuratorki. Między instytucjonalnością a prywatnością) (fig. 9.2), realized in Zielona Góra in 2005, problematized in an interesting way this specific situatedness of the archive as a bordering space located "between institutionalality and privacy." The work simultaneously practiced an opening of the archive, passing it into its afterlife. It revealed the moment of an opening and passing as situations of a tension resulting from the different agendas of an archive's users and a clash of two temporalities: time with a vector and time without a vector.

The work *Non-Exhibition* was a direct reaction to the curators Dorota Monkiewicz and Aneta Szyłak, who were at that time working on historicizing and re-establishing the position of Ewa Partum's artistic practice in Poland, and who had requested that Partum not present her art in Polish institutions until her retrospectives opened in Warsaw and Gdansk.

22 These retrospectives took place in Karlsruhe in 2001, in a double retrospective in Gdańsk and Warsaw in 2006, and in an individual exhibition at the Museum of Art in Łódź in 2014/15.

23 Lisa Baraitser, "Touching Time: Maintenance, Endurance, Care," in *Psychosocial Imaginaries: Perspectives on Temporality, Subjectivities and Activism*, ed. Stephen Frosh (London: Palgrave, 2015), 21–48, 22. Baraitser argues that the practice of care is associated with a different type of time order than art production or art history. She writes that the practice of maintenance allows for a completely different kind of relationship with the dominant ideas of temporality; it allows for some sort of experience of suspended duration, of slurry time not related to the idea of progress or a melancholic past.

Figure 9.2: Ewa Partum, “Non-Exhibition: Curators. Between Institutionalility and Privacy,” action, *Biuro Wystaw Artystycznych, Zielona Góra*, 2005.



Photo © Courtesy of Ewa Partum, ARTUM Foundation, and ewa partum museum.

In response, the artist arranged a quasi-private but professional conversational spectacle—a meeting with curators in the gallery space on the subject of upcoming exhibitions. *Non-Exhibition* is not a systematic intervention of self-historicization; it is also not a performative over-identification with the position of a curator. It is, rather, a strategic shift to the space occupied by the curators. During the conversation, lasting over two hours, the participants not only talk, they also eat cake, drink wine (served by the butler, i.e., Partum’s ex-husband) and, above all, try to articulate their own understanding of Partum’s art. The artist presents on-screen documentation of her works, authorizing it with her authoritative commentary. Partum invites viewers, behind the stage, to a semi-private yet professional sphere in which the communication, negotiation, and translation of archival materials take place. She crosses borders, quoting private (but professional) text messages, emails or

phone calls, problematizing the issue of the in/visibility of the collective work in the archive.

Non-Exhibition reveals the private-institutional constellations of art infrastructures as an area in which curatorial agency is confronted with the need for constant negotiation with the artist's desires and ambitions. Through *Non-Exhibition*, Partum participates in the preparation of the archival material for a retrospective exhibition not only as a provider of content and documentation but also as a producer of new procedures. She intervenes in the sphere between art notations and curatorial narratives, sharing the very negative perception of the curatorial position as described, for instance, by Boris Groys in his essay on curatorial power.²⁴

Not only the poor video quality but also the extremely uncomfortable situation of tense exchanges and confrontations, which normally remain hidden from the viewer's gaze, make this video difficult to watch. It is this difficulty that determines the specificity of this work, which goes beyond recapitulating the conflict (as in the case of some classic Daniel Buren texts) and instead invites viewers to participate in the conflict: they are positioned between the interests and institutions of the artist and the curator.

Through *Non-Exhibition*, Partum reveals the process of the opening of an archive and its passage to the afterlife to be transformational and appropriative exercising her ownership on an arranged stage and trying to counteract the transformation of her art into a "colorful fresco whose meaning escapes the artist."²⁵ Importantly, through her actions, the artist relativizes not only

24 This aspect of curating is discussed by Boris Groys in his essay on "On Curatorship." Groys argues that the curator is a "radically secularized artist" and that the curatorial position is a place from which art objects and their meanings are administered, mostly by the medium of an exhibition. According to Groys, curators do everything that artists do but have no mystical power of transforming object into art. The curator physically situates and contextualizes a work of art, which means that he or she relativizes it and returns it to history. Thus, Groys argues, the curator transforms an autonomous object into an illustration and makes its value dependent on narration. For these reasons, curators became a target for critique by the contemporary artist, who perceives them as "the embodiment of the dark, dangerous side of the exhibiting practice" and the "destructive doppelgänger of the artist." See Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008) 43–53.

25 Daniel Buren, "Exposition d'une exposition—Ausstellung einer Ausstellung," in *Documenta 5*, exhibition catalog, ed. Harald Szeemann (Kassel: Bertelsmann Verlag, 1972), 29; reprinted as: "Exhibition of an Exhibition," in *The Biennial Reader: An Anthology on Large-Scale Perennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Art*, ed. Elena Filipovic, Marieke van

the value of the curator's narrative, but also the artistic gaze, which is revealed as one of the possible types of connections between documents gathered in the archive. Performative opening, making the artistic archive public, takes place here outside the format of the exhibition, in the form of polemic arranged around a table brought from the artist's home. Partum presents and discursively stabilizes the materials from her archive before they are classified as artistic or documentary within the scope of forthcoming exhibitions. It is in that sense an anti-exhibition—a concealment of works of art within their unstable and mutable archive.

VALIE EXPORT: From Personal Archives to Research Center

Another format of *non-exhibition* that mobilizes the boundaries between private and institutional and also aims to open the archive to the public was implemented within the framework of the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz (VEC), Research Center for Media and Performance Art.²⁶ It is not *sensu stricto* a representative/exhibition space but a spatial arrangement that has a disposition of an exhibition.

The center simultaneously fulfills the goals of giving space to the potentially limitless archive material collected by EXPORT and of opening such a space up to researchers. It is located in a building of the former tobacco factory that made the cigarette brand (Super Export) from which the artist took her chosen name, and the center came to life as a joint venture between educational, cultural, and municipal institutions of the city of Linz.²⁷ The collection comprises

well over 100,000 archival materials, such as notes, sketches, concepts, correspondences, drafts, screenplays, preparatory studies, models and many other items. VALIE EXPORT's personal library of several thousand books and magazines, containing pivotal works in the fields of media theory, film stud-

Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall; Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2010), 211.

26 VALIE EXPORT Center Linz, *Research Center for Media and Performance Art*, <https://www.valieexportcenter.at/en>.

27 It is a cooperation of the City of Linz with the LENTOS Art Museum Linz and the University of Arts and Industrial Design Linz.

ies and fine arts, feminism, philosophy, and literature, is also available for research.²⁸

The center is run by Sabine Folie, who curated several comprehensive exhibitions of EXPORT's archives under the title *The Archive as a Place of Artistic Research*, and Dagmar Schink, a managing director who, in her curatorial statement for the *Transfer* show at the International Research Center for Cultural Studies in Vienna in 2018, defined VALIE EXPORT's practice as "research driven"—focused on contemporary anthropology of visual culture, "on the physical, societal, and technological types of relations between body and space."²⁹

The transformation of the artistic archive into a research center implied that several procedures had been introduced in keeping with research center requirements to permit access to files, materials, and records. However, other functionalities were also afforded here to create a representational space.

Research was thus not a secondary supportive instrument but, as in the case of many other institutionalized archives, a constitutive feature—a main factor of the institutional concept. The center is conceptualized not only as a place of reflection on the collection of documents from VALIE EXPORT's private archive, or of meditation on EXPORT's legacy, but it can also stimulate "an endless subdivision of storylines they [the archives] have not themselves set up"³⁰ by opening them to researchers from different backgrounds.

It is worth mentioning that VALIE EXPORT's archives were presented for the first time to the public *as archives* only in 2011, at the comprehensive genealogical exhibition at Kunsthau Bregenz curated by Yilmaz Dziewior. In fifty-seven large display cases, many of VALIE EXPORT's main works were placed "in the context of their genesis by means of preparatory conception drawings, statements, and collages as a well as photos."³¹

Exhibiting the archive is also one of the activities of the VALIE EXPORT Center. As mentioned before, a comprehensive traveling exhibition curated

28 See VALIE EXPORT Center Linz website, <https://www.valieexportcenter.at/en>.

29 "Transfer: Extracts from the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz," 01/03—30/06/2018, curated by Dagmar Schink, IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies, Vienna, www.valieexportcenter.at/en/transfer-extracts-from-the-valie-export-center-linz-within-the-framework-of-ifk-art.

30 De Baere, "Potentiality and Public Space," 110.

31 Yilmaz Dziewior, "Introduction," in *VALIE EXPORT: Archiv*, exhibition catalog, ed. Yilmaz Dziewior (Cologne: Kunsthau Bregenz; König, 2011), 21.

by Sabine Folie was dedicated to the “context variations and transformations that result from the process of artistic research and end up leading to a work of art.”³² For the purpose of the exhibition, the curator developed a very complex and theoretically invested diagram, containing several references to the archival theory that aimed “to show the abstract, hidden, and multi-layered dimensions of the contents of the archive, and to illustrate the artist’s personal thoughts on the archive as part of artistic practice.”³³ The diagram acted as a conceptual framework for the presentation of archival objects and works of art outside the center, while at the center a series of curated selections—called *Glimpses*—conceptualized by Folie have been implemented by the research team at regular intervals of three months. *Glimpses* examine the diversity of roles and positions occupied by VALIE EXPORT (“the artist as...” principle) and also represent the artist as the primary archivist of her artistic, curatorial, and educational work. Through these exhibitions the afterlife of the archive is curated and controlled by professional discourses.

The aim of the center is also to create an opportunity for professional researchers to access material in both real and digital space. The organizing principle of the archive in both sets of translations is to construct as little as possible,³⁴ in other words, to transfer “the proliferating system of the *wild order*”³⁵ implemented by the artist into the new spatial arrangements without transforming its logic. In that sense, the archive becomes a collective work of the artist, curators, and researchers. The digital space (still in progress), on the other hand, is conceptualized as a rhizomatic structure that enables dynamic connections between particular materials in all possible ways.

The real space that rearticulates and exhibits the system implemented by EXPORT represents an open spatial arrangement evoking the idea of acces-

32 Sabine Folie, “Context-Variations: Research—Archive—Oeuvre of VALIE EXPORT” in *VALIE EXPORT Forschung—Archiv—Werk / Research—Archive—Oeuvre*, exhibition brochure, ed. Sabine Folie; exhibition at Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin, June 9–August 12, 2018. The notion of “context variations” recalls the title of EXPORT’s cycle of photographs titled *KONTEXT-VARIATIONEN: ZUSTANDSÄNDERUNGEN > BEDEUTUNGSVERÄNDERUNGEN (Zur Mythologie der Zivilisation)* [Context variations: Alterations of state > Alterations of meaning (On the mythology of civilization)] from 1971.

33 Folie, “Context-Variations,” 9.

34 I would like to thank Dagmar Schink for generous help with my research and the information that she provided me during my visits to the VEC in 2019 and 2020.

35 Folie, “Context-Variations,” 9.

sibility while at the same time recalling the notion of an artist as public intellectual. Within this arrangement the aesthetic of the archive (fig. 9.3) is complemented by the aesthetic of the library (fig. 9.4).

Figure 9.3: *The archive at VALIE EXPORT Center, Linz, 2019.*

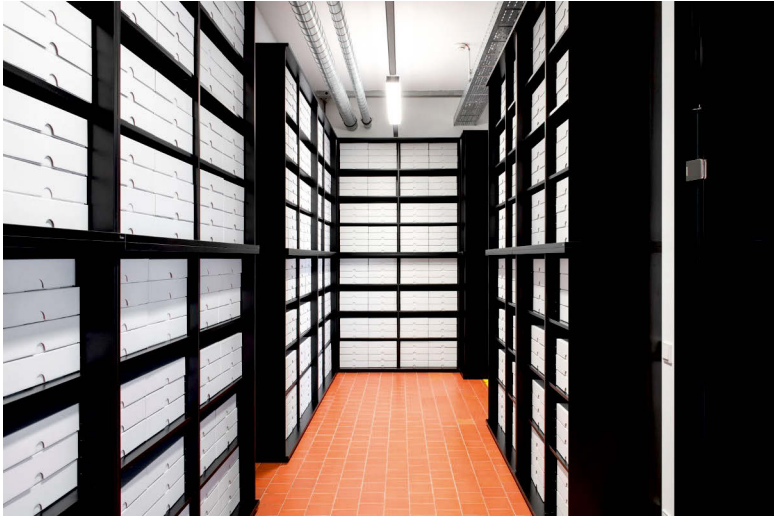


Photo: Violetta Wakolbinger

A constitutive feature of this non-exhibition is the artist's private library, taken directly from VALIE EXPORT's own apartment and transferred to the specially designed shelves at the center. The library is an indicator of EXPORT's network of contacts (catalogs of exhibitions, projects), diversified but consistently cultivated interests, and proof of her expertise and professionalism. If the archive is the backstage of the artistic practice, the library is the backstage to EXPORT's archive, positioning archival objects as effects of EXPORT's extended research and intellectual labor. In addition, the library is open to use and performatively complements the concept of the center as a space devoted to research. We can discover here *the artist doing research—the artist at work*, as all the notes and remarks made by VALIE EXPORT are still preserved in the books' pages (and are gradually being transferred to digital space). Most importantly, however, the library functions as a frame: a stable base from which to access unstable and boundless material accumulated in

Figure 9.4: The library at VALIE EXPORT Center, Linz, 2019.

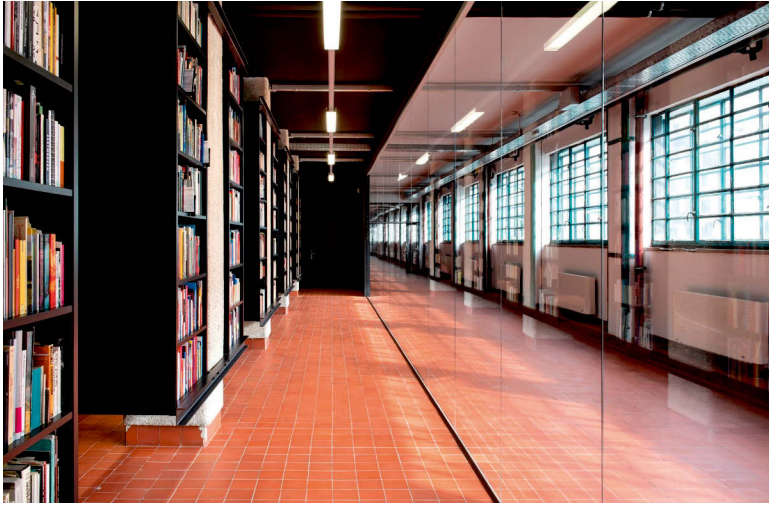


Photo: Violetta Wakolbinger

the archive that includes, in addition to professional work, also private correspondence and notes. If every archival document and artefact contains “an abundance of evidence relating to cultural, aesthetic and social contexts of a certain point in time,”³⁶ the library’s collection of books and notes constitutes a certain stabilizing *con-text* for the materials gathered in the archive. EXPORT’s practice itself continues to focus on the contextual conversions of meanings. Sabine Folie has argued that “since the beginning of her artistic activity in the late 1960s, VALIE EXPORT has been devoted to the contextual shifts and variations of bodies and subjects in ‘processes of civilization.’”³⁷

The library is a hypertext constituted by published works and unpublished notes made by the artist. It is a new form of a display of the artistic research that as a practice “continuously takes place in an in-between, the space between archiving knowledge production and active artistic thought ceaselessly

36 Barbara Büscher, “Lost and Found: Archiving Performance,” in Büscher and Cramer, *Fluid Access*, 66–82, 69.

37 Folie, “Context-Variations,” 7.

able to adopt different contours.”³⁸ Henk Slager, in his essay on “Critique of Archival Reason,” argues that today the archiving display strategy implemented by artists often directs itself merely “towards the verb, i.e. on how we institute, and thus also on how imagination and artistic thinking can be instituted in a different way.”³⁹ VALIE EXPORT’s private library, established as part of the VALIE EXPORT Center Linz, Research Center for Media and Performance Art, is a perfect example of such an attempt.

Conclusion

To conclude, I would like to go back to Peter Osborne’s text mentioned at the beginning of this essay. Osborne writes:

The artistic archive is no longer a documentary archive that surrounds the works of the collection with interpretative materials but a combined archive of works and documents in which “the scene, the stage” of the fate of works are laid out, in a functional equivalent to the transformative space produced by the passion and love of the ideal private collector.⁴⁰

The fragmentation and incompleteness of Ewa Partum’s archive reflects not merely historical circumstances related to the fate of the art history of “communist Europe—marked by repression, immigration and missing archives—often conceptualized as interrupted history, interrupted development,”⁴¹ or to the limited accessibility of technical means of documentation behind the “Iron Curtain.” It results from and tells the story of Partum’s artistic attitude that influenced and shaped her practices of care and maintenance. Her practice of self-historicization is and was directed merely not toward the accumulation of traces of her activities but rather toward amplification of her activities by self-instituting, i.e., assuming different institutional positions and strategies within art infrastructures.

38 Slager, *The Pleasure of Research*, 83.

39 Slager, 83.

40 Osborne, *The Postconceptual Condition*, 129.

41 Łukasz Ronduda and Florian Zeyfan, “Introduction,” in 1,2,3... *Avant-Gardes: Film/Art Between Experiment and Archive*, exhibition catalog, eds. Łukasz Ronduda, Florian Zeyfan (Warsaw: Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle; Berlin, Sternberg Press: 2007) 8–11, 9.

VALIE EXPORT's archive, on the other hand, is a manifestation of the artist's research-driven approach and her need to master her artistic output through the archival gaze. The archive is understood as a place of creative work, a material component, a basis, or a pivotal fragment of the artistic practice ("*The Archive as a Place of Artistic Research*," as Sabine Folie has it): simultaneously a source and a by-product of the artistic process. Its boundlessness also reveals EXPORT's striving for completeness, her tendency to control and stabilize the meaning of her artistic output, transforming the archive in its afterlife's institutional setting into a VALIE EXPORT "heritage." The word "heritage" indicates also that something has been left behind, abandoned. Paradoxically—and here we can refer to the undeclared disposition of the archive—the need to master the archival gaze created a circumstance that enabled the artist to leave the archive behind her and invite others onto the stage.

Both artists, in different ways, mobilized the potential of an archive's situatedness within artistic infrastructure as a switch between the professional and private spheres. In Keller Easterling's words the switch is "an active form that modulates a flow of activities." It is a "lever or dial in determining unanticipated dispositions."⁴² In the same way, artistic archives accumulated and formed by Partum and EXPORT and identified as key to their practices allow an undeclared disposition of their artistic practices to be revealed. As a result, both practices can be read as opposing rather than parallel, corresponding, or correlated artistic endeavors. In terms of their archival strategies, Partum subordinated the archival gaze to the artistic one, which privileged the politics of radical reduction, instability, and mutability as well as a direct intervention into reality. EXPORT, on the other hand, mastered the archival gaze within the research-based artistic practice informed by discourses on "space and time, contingency, science, technology, quantum physics, anthropology, [and] behavioral science,"⁴³ concerned with the epistemic dimension of art, i.e., with the production of knowledges.

Undoubtedly, the feminist practices of Partum and EXPORT took different turns in the 1980s and '90s. EXPORT developed her media-oriented investigation into inscriptions, conventions, and social apparatuses that regulate the body⁴⁴ into a critique of digital capitalism and examination of the

42 Easterlink, *Extrastatecraft*, 76.

43 Folie, "Prologue to a Script," 22.

44 Folie, 22.

fragmented mediatized subject while Partum, after revisiting the medium of performance, arrived at the artistic formula that directly intervenes in the biopolitical dimension of life and the consequences of real politics for the lives of women in marginalized locations. From the perspective of their archives, that is, considering their archival practices, these developments seem logical and immanent.

artpool.hu: a user's guide

Remediation, Digitization and the Networked Art Archive

Roddy Hunter and Judit Bodor

** /* addressing artpool's coordinates
*/ **

In 1979, Artpool's first postal address was György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay's 'apartment-institution' at 1023 Budapest, Frankel Leó út 68/B,¹ while its web address www.artpool.hu (fig. 10.1) appeared in 1995,² where it still resides online today. While the postal address provided send and receive coordinates within the international correspondence art network, the web address provided an upload and retrieval location on the internet. Correspondence art—a term preferred by Galántai to 'mail art'³—is more often described as a "precursor to art and activism on the Internet"⁴ than the implied claim of displacement or remediation between the two is explored. As such, we will ask here how far artpool.hu as a 'virtual' presence extends or detracts from

1 György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, eds., *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 38. Artpool's name had changed to Artpool Art Research Center in 1992 when it physically moved to a new home at Budapest VI. Liszt Ferenc tér 10., and where it operated until 2020 as a publicly accessible artist-run organization, *Artpool*, 122.

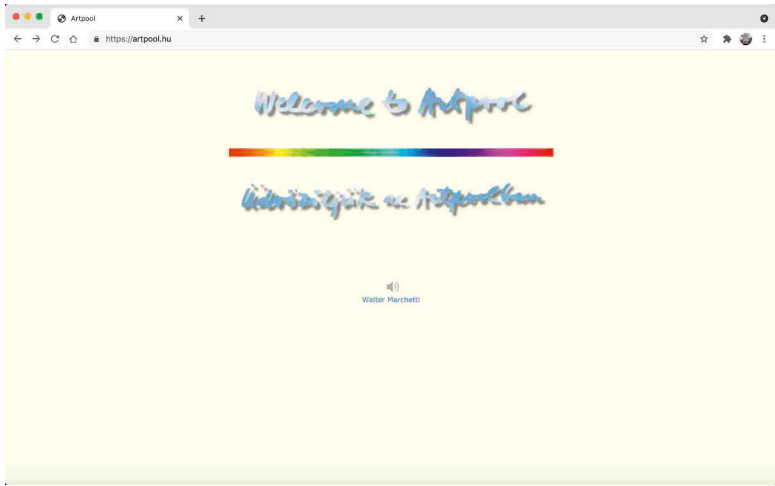
2 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 207.

3 Kata Bodor, "'... I would like to be connected to the time I'm in...': Interview with György Galántai," in *Parastamps: Four Decades of Artistamps, from Fluxus to the Internet*, exhibition catalog (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2007), 84–100, <https://artpool.hu/Artistamp/text/Galantai.html>.

4 Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006).

Artpool's realization as an 'active archive'.⁵ Is it more or less a digital index of physical artefacts, or has the hypertextual, hypermedia web influenced Artpool's exploration of networked art practice in other ways?

Figure 10.1: "Welcome to Artpool."



Screenshot of <https://www.artpool.hu/>

To assess this, we will explore Artpool's pre-internet activity, principally through examining the remediation strategies at work in *Radio Artpool* (1983–87), in contrast to the later web adaptations of offline works *UNI/vers*(;) (1988/1997), and *Networker Bridge* (1994/1997). Following this transition from offline to online networked art practice, we will consider the *Ray Johnson Web Site* (1997), an online exhibition held in parallel to its offline counterpart *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* at Ernst Museum, Budapest (1997). Taking a media archaeological approach to excavating these mediatic layers and "historical conditions"⁶ can help us understand artpool.hu's contribution to networked art practice from the contemporary perspective of digital—and

5 György Galántai, "Active Archive," (1979–2003), in Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 15. https://artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

6 Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses*, 2nd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), xv. Parikka's description "archaeological layer" changes to "historical conditions" between the first and second editions.

now post-digital—culture. Given the relative longevity of artpool.hu, it may also help us understand something about “how we ended up in this digital culture and [perhaps] find alternative ways of thinking about [it].”⁷ In 2020, over forty years since its founding as an apartment-institution in state socialist Hungary, Artpool became part of KEMKI, the Central European Research Institute of Art History at the Museum of Fine Arts, changing its coordinates to 1135 Budapest, Szabolcs u. 33., D. ép. As artpool.hu remains its web address, for the moment at least, our analysis and evaluation of its influence on Artpool’s mission and possible future as an ‘active archive’ seems timelier than ever.

** /* artpool, the ‘active archive’ and the 100-year plan */ **

Also in 1979, Galántai set out Artpool’s aims:

1. To collect material for the museum of artistic inventions scheduled to open in 2079.
2. To inspire the founding of the museum.
3. To fill the gap, for the time being, with spaces available periodically.
4. To operate as part of the museum when it is established (according to the original plans).⁸

Galántai’s prescient manifesto was fulfilled in 2015, sixty-four years ahead of schedule, when Artpool Art Research Center became part of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Apparently diverging from both a historical avant-garde impulse to destroy or negate museums⁹ and a neo-avant-gardist predilection for pseudo institutions,¹⁰ Galántai aimed to redraw the criteria of institu-

7 CCCB Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, “Interview with Jussi Parikka,” *I+C+i. Our Life Online*, February 24, 2012, video, 11:20, <https://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/interview-with-jussi-parikka-i/211694>.

8 *Galántai: Életmunkák = Galántai: Lifeworks 1968–1993*, exhibition catalog, ed. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool; Enciklopédia, 1996), 244.

9 Example here include Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Manifesto of Futurism,” *Le Figaro* (February 20, 1909) https://www.societyforasianart.org/sites/default/files/manifesto_futurista.pdf.

10 We are thinking here in particular of Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers and Robert Filliou’s work featured in A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, *Museums by Artists* (Toronto:

tional canons, especially in Hungary, to recognize and include experimental 'artistic inventions'. As such, Artpool's collection policy differed from conventional museum practice, at least until now, in being an 'active archive', which "does not only collect material already existing 'out there' but [...] also generates the very material to be archived."¹¹ This methodology differentiates Artpool as "a living institution that can be interpreted as an organic and open artwork or an activist art practice,"¹² but also reveals it as an institution nonetheless.

Given the sensibility of the 'active archive', however, we might reasonably expect Galántai to conceive of artpool.hu as more than an index or repository of digitized pre-internet network art, albeit this would be one of its primary functions. Whether realized through analogue, digital, electronic, or physical media, networked art practices materialize *in flux and flow* through text, sound, action, photography, and video, *becoming through transmission* between sending and receiving, writing and reading, encoding and decoding, unfolding and beholding. As an online storage and retrieval platform, moreover, artpool.hu added impetus to Galántai and Klaniczay's ambitions to digitize Artpool's existing collections. However, the question remains as to whether the artistic and curatorial methodologies employed in creating artpool.hu have, after twenty-five years, led to anything more than a repository of *things made digital* also to become a repertoire of *things digitally made*.

** /* mapping material and conceptual dimensions */ **

Entering "site:artpool.hu" into the Google search engine at the time of writing typically returns between about 10–14,000 results, each representing a different webpage written in either English or Hungarian. How to begin then outlining a historical, critical, and philosophical 'sitemap' of artpool.hu to understand its parameters and properties? Artpool itself, of which artpool.hu is an integral part, is *made of information*. It exists to gather and produce documentation through Galántai's ongoing request since 1978 to "please send

Art Metropole, 1983). His *Buda Ray University* aside, Galántai appears serious about his desire to construct Artpool as an actual rather than pseudo-institution.

11 Galántai, "Active Archive."

12 Galántai, "Active Archive."

me information about your activity,”¹³ thus encapsulating the ‘active archive’ methodology. He is, in this respect, one of those artists described by Sarah Cook who has “consistently drawn attention to the occurrence and location of information, most often through interfering with the stages of its processing or mediation via transmission and reception.”¹⁴ The information subsequently generated and exchanged by *networked addressees* underpins Artpool's ontology as both an artistic-conceptual communication platform and a networked artwork in itself.

Galántai constructs Artpool in this way to question existing forms, paradigms, systems, and structures of knowledge. Influenced by contemporary currents of conceptual and systems art internationally through the late 1960s and early 1970s, he sought to identify “those permanent and simplest elements which would allow me to rebuild everything according to a different logic.”¹⁵ Of his early works, he describes “[breaking down] form into line and blot” so the “steady stream of correlations and cross-references generates the composition” notwithstanding “a certain tension [as] elements get disconnected from one another or come to contradict one another, but somehow the connection remains.”¹⁶ Although describing his approach to painting, printmaking and sculpture, these principles have remained consistent throughout his practice regardless of medium. They certainly extend to his artistic handling of information as material in the context of Artpool and his privileging of ideas over medium.

Galántai analyses concepts, phenomena, and situations to understand dynamic and contingent interactions and interrelations between their constituent elements. Following the computational thinking of John von Neumann, Galántai considers how these elements are “organized into a system,” the “safety and efficiency” of which is determined by the “quality and quantity of the information that flows through it.”¹⁷ Inspired further by von Neumann's work on computational architectures, Galántai conceives

13 This request was first printed on the Hungarian-English poster-catalog of his book objects exhibition at Fészek Klub, Budapest, and circulated internationally. *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 120 and 303.

14 Sarah Cook, “Introduction: The Message Is the Medium,” in *Information* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 12.

15 *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 46.

16 *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 46.

17 The quotation is from Artpool's 2010 webpage, <https://www.artpool.hu/Default2010.html>.

the 'active archive' of Artpool as *a system to process art as information and vice versa* and therefore as an artwork able to function as information technology. This conceptual ambition is abetted and enhanced in practice by the online interface of artpool.hu as a digital materialization of the archival system. artpool.hu extends the function and materiality of the 'active archive' further to incorporate the *digital preservation*, as well as generation, of information.

artpool.hu launched on December 1, 1995, only two years after the NCSA Mosaic browser release. It is one of the few remaining websites in operation since the beginnings of the publicly accessible internet in Hungary. Apparently developing as much organically as by design¹⁸, its mid-1990s aesthetic and material ontology persists until today, offering and currently preserving a twenty-five-year-old HTML interface. Alexander R. Galloway describes HTML as "the interface between legible text and markup tags" which as a "[marker] of difference constitute[s] the artificial distinction between two media and allow[s] media to be remediated into other forms."¹⁹ HTML provides Galántai with both an interactive interface and potential remediation strategies to connect Artpool to the "random galaxy"²⁰ of the web.

Artpool's engagement with networked art practices evolved side by side, moreover, with developing *electronic* communications technologies such as telephone,²¹ fax,²² and videophone,²³ particularly in the 1980s and '90s. These transmissions enabled a hybrid space, neither 'here' nor 'there', of looped interaction, dialogue and feedback, temporarily collapsing the space-time distance between send and receive coordinates to create a liminal space of allegorical immediacy. artpool.hu emerges in the wake of this 'virtualization'²⁴

18 An apparently retrospective site map only appeared in 2021, <https://artpool.hu/sitemap.html>.

19 Alexander R. Galloway, "Flusseriana," *Culture and Communication*, October 28, 2015, <http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/flusseriana>.

20 György Galántai's virtual lecture at "Internet.galaxis," Museum of Ethnography, 2000, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html>.

21 Artpool, "Budapest—Bécs—Berlin telefonkoncert," *Aktuális Levél* 4 (April 1983): 9–13, <https://artpool.hu/Al/al04/telefonkoncert.html>.

22 "Budapest Session of the Decentralized World Wide Networker Congress, Artpool, August 4–26, 1992," artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/events/Congress92/01.html>.

23 "Danube Connection, Artpool (Hungary)—Zeronet (Austria), September 4–10, 1993," artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/1993/930908_me.html.

24 We agree with Alexander R. Galloway's reading that "virtualization has nothing to do with 'virtual reality' or with computers per se [is] not because it is cybernetic or phan-

of networked art practice as part of a broader “culture [which] wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation [...]”²⁵ reflected by growing interest in telecommunications and telepresence. That said, the avowedly opaque HTML interface of artpool.hu speaks of itself as a modernist artwork “acknowledging the condition of its own mediation”²⁶ as an apparatus of hypermediacy instead of the transparent immediacy of immersive media such as virtual reality.

** /*
radio artpool: sounding the network */ **

You should go to Budapest. Budapest is such a beautiful city and so fucking cheap by our western standards.

The food is so fucking good, you gotta go to Italy.

Igen, igen, igen, igen, ee-gen, igen, ee-gen, igen ...²⁷

Artpool's early networking activities include their 'Art Tours' to Italy in 1979 and across Western and Central Europe in 1982. Galántai and Klaniczay visited artists they knew from previous contact through the correspondence art network to exchange and create information and documentation. With the 'active archive' as, to borrow Seth Siegelaub's phrase, a “system of documentation,”²⁸ they made audio recordings throughout the 1982 art tour as a way to generate and collect “material to be archived.”²⁹ The resulting networker field recordings capture a range of social conversations, meetings and events ranging from hanging out with a couple of Monty Cantsins³⁰ and other artists in a

tasmagorical but because of the way in which it thrusts the actuality of specific situations into a newfound flux of indistinction.” Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 58.

25 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 5.

26 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 58.

27 Excerpts from conversations on *Radio Artpool*, no. 5, 1982, <https://artpool.hu/sound/radio/5.html>.

28 Seth Siegelaub, *January 5–31*, exhibition catalog (New York: Seth Siegelaub, 1969).

29 Galántai, “Active Archive.”

30 “Monty Cantsin,” from *Seven by Nine Squares*, thing.de, accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.thing.de/projekte/7:9%23/cantsin_02.html.

Kassel *Biergarten* on June 18 during Documenta 7 to ambient evening recordings from a gondola and at an exhibition by Dieter Roth on July 27 during the Venice Biennale. The Kassel recording conveys the impression of networkers meeting face to face, possibly for the first time, enjoying social contact, cultural mobility, internationalized experience and exchange.

As Galántai was only able to buy a video camera in 1988, courtesy of winning a DAAD Scholarship,³¹ audio tape recording would have been an obvious way, beyond photography, to document and later reproduce events from the art tours. The recordings became edition no. 5 of *Radio Artpool*, a series of eight audio cassettes curated and compiled mainly by Galántai³² between 1983 and 1987, and presumably exchanged with other networkers through the post or in person. *Radio Artpool* remediated live music, concert and radio performances, field and studio recordings, exhibition events, telecommunications projects, conversations, poetry, and journeys as 'pseudo-radio', 'cassette-radio' or 'radio-work'. It documented relatively contemporaneous work and events of the 1980s but also featured, albeit infrequently, recordings from as early as 1972.

Radio Artpool responds to the challenge of distributing and exchanging information and documentation about contemporary artistic practice across the borders of state-socialist Hungary. While state censorship was undoubtedly significant in this respect, the cassette culture of self-publishing and distribution of experimental music was already emerging across Western and Eastern Europe and beyond by the launch of *Radio Artpool* in 1983. Particularly appropriate for 'difficult' art forms ranging from sound poetry to industrial music, home taping for recording and reproduction enabled a new channel of independent cultural production whose reach could be as global as the postal system. Overall, *Radio Artpool* was primarily a samizdat strategy of contextualizing Hungarian artists' work within the contemporary international sphere, circumventing access to radio waves through mailed or otherwise exchanged audio cassettes.

In addition to the 'Art Tour' of 1982, the series also documented significant events such as the *Telefonmusik. Wien-Budapest-Berlin* concert on April 15, 1983, organized by Robert Adrian and Helmut Mark for BLIX in Vienna, Rainald Schumacher in Berlin, and János Vető and Artpool in Budapest. Featured on *Radio Artpool* 3, the *Telefon konzert* is worth analyzing further to understand the

31 Galántai: *Lifeworks*, 95.

32 László Lugosi and Attila Grandpierre were the exceptions, compiling editions no. 2 and no. 7.

multiple stages or layers of artistic and curatorial remediation at work in *Radio Artpool* and its emergence from the material conditions of the international context surrounding state-socialist Hungary in the 1980s. We take remediation as defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” and which “[a]long with immediacy and hypermediacy [...] is one of the three traits of [their] genealogy of new media.”³³ As a concept, remediation has evolved from understanding ‘new’ media as either a container³⁴ or improvement³⁵ of ‘old’ media through to Bolter and Grusin’s counter-determinist, non-linear idea of refashioning, repurposing and recycling.

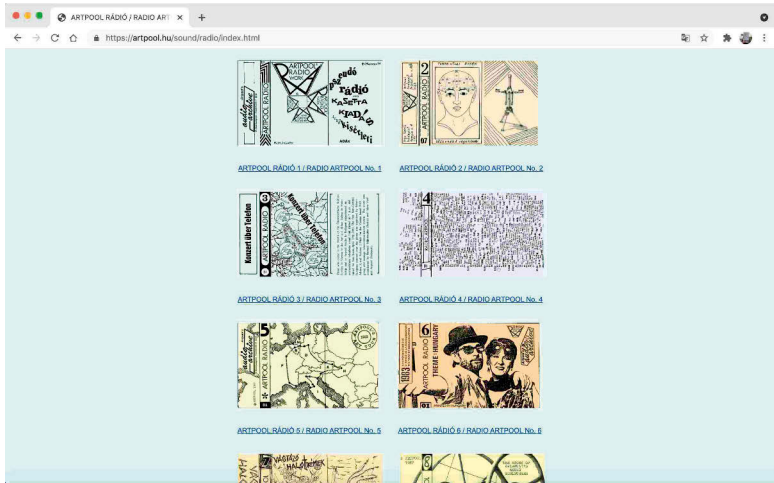
In the *Telefon koncert*, live music is first remediated by narrowband telephonic transmission and then, secondly, as a tape recording of that transmission documented on audio cassette. The event is then conceptually remediated as ‘radio’, insofar as it reaches listeners through the post or personal exchange or, since its digitization in 2011, through the navigable interface of artpool.hu. (fig. 10.2) In this way, remediation here encompasses live performance, analogue transmission, tape recording, cassette design, production and distribution, digitization, upload and stream. In this process, the network of addressees proliferates from active participants in the initial live exchange to those geographically and historically redistributed and displaced as increasingly passive, albeit interested and engaged, listeners. No longer dialing the intended listener ahead of transmission, the broadcast now rests, stored on a server, waiting to enact a future event once discovered by a new user. The digital interface of artpool.hu appears to collapse production, distribution and reception into the same instance, navigable through the web browser. The liveness of most *Radio Artpool* recordings aesthetically retains a sense of broadcasting from Artpool’s geographical or historical coordinates to the user’s contemporary moment of reception.

33 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 273.

34 Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium Is the Message,” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

35 Paul Levinson, “Survival of the Media Fit,” in *The Soft Edge: A Natural History and Future of the Information Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Figure 10.2: Radio Artpool's website, 2011.

Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/sound/radio/index.html>

/* digitization, adaptation, remediation and the 'web-museum'*/

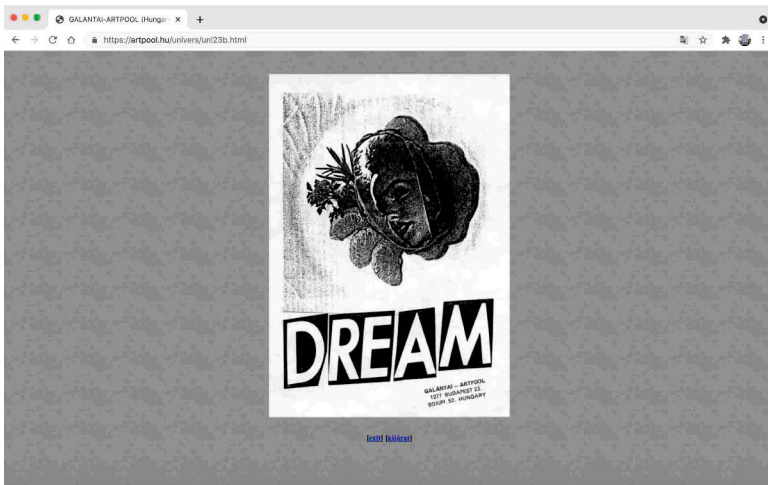
` /* UNI/vers(;) */ `
` /* Net-`
`worker Bridge */ `

As a digitization project, artpool.hu focuses mainly on curatorial projects instigated by Galántai to generate material for the 'active archive', often hyperlinked to other resources on the web. Recent rethinking of the relationship between the 'digital' and the 'analogue', particularly by Galloway,³⁶ leads us to clarify that we mean 'digitization' here in its most commonly accepted sense of converting analogue data into digital form, typically for archival purposes. By 'digital form', we mean an encoded instantiation available for storage, reproduction and transmission by digital means and media—the web as an example—as distinct from the unilaterally 'analogue' instantiation of the irreducibly 'real' object artefact.

³⁶ Galloway, *Laruelle*.

artpool.hu draws on digitization as the basis of artistic and curatorial adaptation or remediation and as an interactive interface through which new, potential addressees can enter the (net)work. The *Artpool Web-Museum*³⁷ includes, for example, Guillermo Deisler's *UNI/vers(;)*, a 1988 "anthology of visual and experimental poetry,"³⁸ exhibited both physically at Artpool Art Research Center and as a 'web adaptation'³⁹ on artpool.hu during Artpool's *Year of the Network* in 1997. (fig. 10.3) The web adaptation mirrors the interactive nature of the physical bookwork whose pages the reader could assemble in different ways. By comparison, the online user navigates the work through a random sequence of pages by clicking on image maps created from each page's digitization.

Figure 10.3: *Artpool Web-Museum: Guillermo Deisler's "UNI/vers(;)"*, 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/univers/uni23b.html>

As a respectful than aggressive remediation,⁴⁰ the electronic version "justifies itself by granting access to the older media [so that] the viewer stands in

37 "Artpool Web-Museum," 2008, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/onlineshow.html>.

38 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 214.

39 "UNI/vers(;)" 1997, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/univers/uni.html>.

40 Jay David Bolter, "Aggressive Remediation: Radically Reforming Old Media," 2021, <https://vimeo.com/groups/427030/videos/28190549>.

the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the original medium.”⁴¹ Such an adaptation effectively preserves both the content and manner of reading the work. A default approach, by comparison, could be to simply scan and reproduce the pages either individually or in a linear PDF.⁴² It seems anomalous at the same time that the remediation renders the interactive adaptation monochrome, resembling a scanned photocopy in terms of its aesthetic character and quality. The respectful remediation otherwise preserves the work’s non-linear and interactive navigability without wear or damage caused by physical browsing. Achieving this by preserving both the performative manner of engaging with the work as well as its content makes the web-adaptation arguably the ‘ideal’ copy.⁴³

Other works in the *Artpool Web-Museum* similarly explore how the interactive interface offers digital preservation through remediation. As with Deisler’s *UNI/vers(:)*, the remediation of Galántai’s 1994 *Networker Bridge* from bookwork to interactive webpage is more or less respectful to its source instantiation, while taking the opportunity to ‘improve’ the original by adding hyperlinked sound to its text and graphics. (fig. 10.4) The work comprises a ‘virtual’ pack of sixty-four tarot cards derived from an eight-page A5 bookwork made “in homage to the networker friends of Artpool.”⁴⁴ Four ‘virtual’ cards are laid out face down in a row horizontally across the top of the browser window. Beneath the row of four cards are sixty-four hyperlinked names of artists in two columns. When individually clicked, one of the four cards turn face up to reveal a graphic artwork by that artist. The initial impression is that the card appears in a random column, but on closer inspection it clearly appears in the same place each time.

Sound is a significant additional element not available to the viewer in the bookwork instantiation. The turning of each card triggers a specific MP3

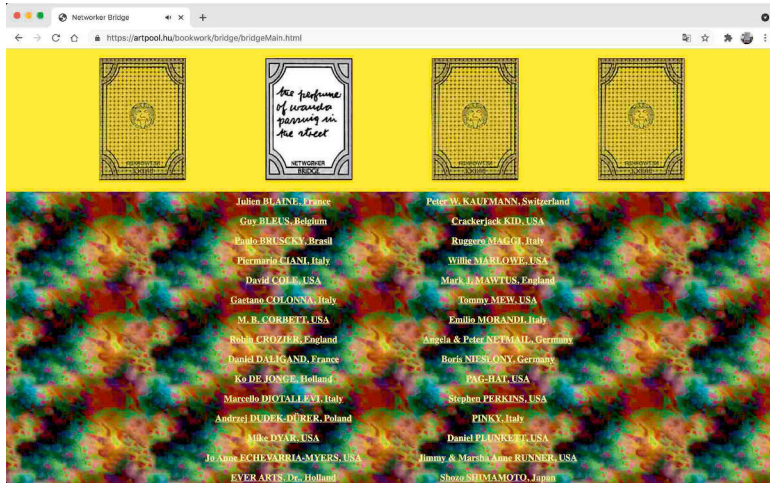
41 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 45.

42 Cf. Guillermo Deisler’s *UNI/vers(:)*, published online at Monoskop, https://monoskop.org/images/b/b3/Univers_2_1988.pdf or at Fondazione Bonotto <http://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/deislerguillermo/catalogue/8067.html>.

43 Conscious of coincidentally appropriating the title of English post-punk band Wire’s 1985 album, “The Ideal Copy,” we are instead thinking of Galántai’s “ideal web-site,” as illustrated by hyperlinking to Endre Tót’s page (<https://artpool.hu/Tot/Default.html>) from in György Galántai’s virtual lecture at “Internet.galaxis,” Museum of Ethnography, 2000, [artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html#id](https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html#id).

44 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 503.

Figure 10.4: “Networker Bridge” at Artpool’s website, 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/bookwork/bridge/bridgeMain.html>

audio loop of sound art, the relationship of which to the particular artist or image, however, is unclear. The viewer can trigger four MP3 loops at once, one for each column, allowing different combinations of layered loops. Although *Networker Bridge*'s temporal interactivity when remediated as a web-page marks a clear difference from its earlier instantiation as a bookwork, its shared title and content indicate the remediation retains and acknowledges the primary importance of the source work.

Such fidelity between initial and remediated instantiations of an artwork is less evident in the creation of *Networker Bridge* as a physical bookwork in the first instance. Galántai made this earlier version in 1994 by recycling and repurposing material from *Networker Post* (1992–94), a photocopied edition in 100 copies of 100 stamp sheets created by 100 artists as part of the 1992 *Decentralized Networker Congress*. This type of remediation emerges from the (neo-)avant-garde tradition of collage, copy art, and appropriation as a generative artistic strategy of making something new from existing material. As an archival method, digitization becomes an intermediary to preservation, whereas (neo-)avant-garde artistic techniques such as cut-up and collage act to reconfigure existing material more freely and aggressively. Digitization is

a form of preservation that archives itself as a method wrapped around its object.

In contrast, cut-up and collage intervene within the work, leading to its transformation and reconfiguration. In this sense, the interactivity of artpool.hu still essentially enhances the 'active archive' by preserving its existing collection—albeit according to a new remediated order—rather than generating new material to be archived. The transformation and remediation of work in the process of its digital preservation recall Galántai's interest and working method in atomizing the whole to then reintegrate its elements within a new assemblage according to a different logic. The approaches taken to *UNI/vers()*, and *Networker Bridge* also provide insight into Galántai's thinking about how to liberate aesthetic experience from the bounds of the physical object in his 'museum of artistic inventions'.

** /* please add to
and return: artpool's ray johnson website */ **

Of the twenty-nine projects in the *Artpool Web-Museum*,⁴⁵ one of the most significant to test online remediation is the web-adaptation of the *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* exhibition online at artpool.hu and offline at Ernst Museum, Budapest in 1997. Conceptually curated across online and offline spaces at once, the exhibition focused on Johnson's practice particularly through his correspondence with Artpool from 1982 until he died in 1995. Johnson is invariably credited as instrumental in forming correspondence art as a distinct art practice and form at the turn of the 1950s and the '60s.⁴⁶ At this time, he began circulating drawings, collages, and prints through the postal system instructing correspondents to "Please send to ..." or "Please add to and return ...,"⁴⁷ thus encouraging chance, unpredictability and, distributed, networked authorship into his work.

45 "Artpool Web-Museum," artpool.hu, 2008, <https://artpool.hu/onlineshow.html>.

46 Ken Friedman, "The Early Days of Mail Art: An Historical Overview," in *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, ed. Chuck Welch (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 3–16.

47 "Glossary," *Ray Johnson Estate*, accessed March 12, 2021, <http://www.rayjohnsonestate.com/glossary/>.

Johnson's first mailing to Artpool came in 1982 following Galántai's concerted efforts to establish correspondence since 1979.⁴⁸ Rather than forwarding Johnson's mailing to Wally Darnell in Saudi Arabia as requested, Galántai intervened by photocopying and redistributing it across Artpool's correspondence network for addition and modification and only then returned to Johnson. Thus began Galántai's *Buda Ray University* in response to Johnson's *Buddha University*, itself a reincarnation of *The New York Correspondance [sic] School* to establish Artpool's coordinates in Johnson's network. As a "visual communication network project,"⁴⁹ the *Buda Ray University* resulted in work by 580 artists responding to Ray Johnson's five letters to Artpool between 1982 and 1988. This work formed one of eight sections of the exhibition, exhibited physically in Ernst Museum, with the same material digitized and exhibited on artpool.hu. The other sections included archival and bibliographic material, original artworks by Johnson and others, including "memorial works made after his death, correspondence [sic] from Artpool archives and across the network, and the Artpool Ray Johnson website and links to other online material."⁵⁰

The *Ray Johnson Website* digitally preserves, reorders and disseminates the project beyond the duration of the physical exhibition and provides a resource for further research on Johnson's practice. Galántai considered the website "a work for the internet"⁵¹ combining "the sensation of a walk in a museum with leafing through a catalog or studying a book."⁵² Of particular importance was situating the exhibition within the hypermedia and hyperlinked context of the web to facilitate the "discovery of all other sites related to Ray Johnson in the world."⁵³ Freed from the physical museum's spatial and temporal boundaries, the user experiences a much less linear, spatially predicated drift through the exhibition archive. Signifying chains of association and connection transpire through the user's browsing choices both within and beyond the online coordinates of artpool.hu, circumventing a degree of institutional curatorial authority.

48 György Galántai, "The Budapest Story of Ray Johnson," 1997, artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/Ray/RJ_history.html.

49 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 59.

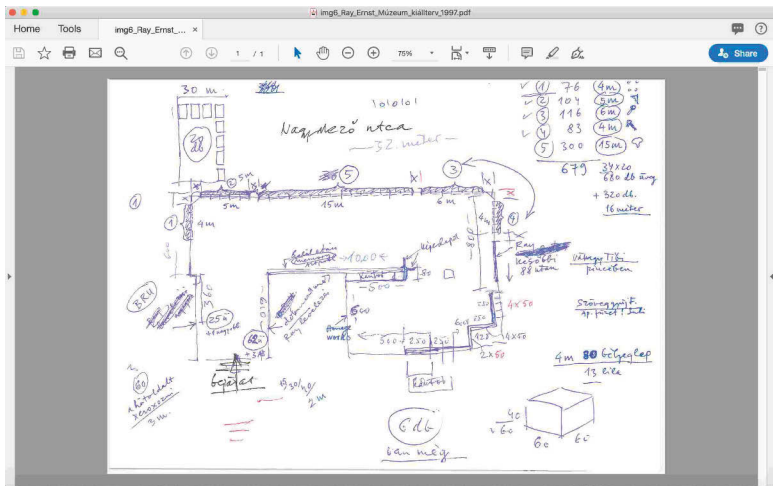
50 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 215.

51 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site," artpool.hu, 1997, https://artpool.hu/Ray/Ray_about.html.

52 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site."

53 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site."

Figure 10.5: György Galántai, "Exhibition Plan for Ray Johnson Memorial Space," Ernst Museum, Budapest, February 19–March 23, 1997.



Courtesy of György Galántai and Artpool Art Research Center.

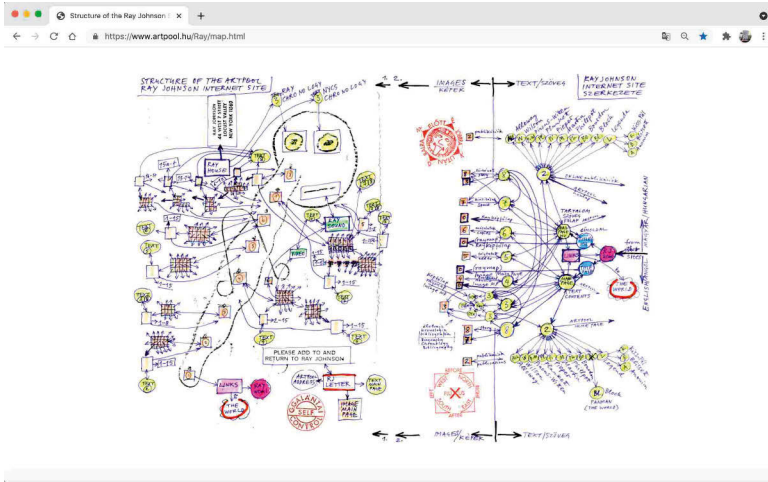
Galántai's hypertext, *A Garden of Correspondence*, prefaces the online exhibition with his curatorial notes, explaining that "the internet work [as the] representation and demonstration of exchange [...] is an open work."⁵⁴ Further, to preserve the permanence of the open work is also to "preserve its alterability."⁵⁵ By alterability, Galántai does not mean material manipulation of artworks, but instead the infinite possibilities of interpretation created through the work of the 'future artist' whose task is not to "create so called works, but to construct, cultivate territories that can relate to one another."⁵⁶ The idea of the website, of the online exhibition or museum as a garden, emphasizes then a place of long-term cultivation of information based on wandering and finding new connections. In short, the *Ray Johnson Website* offers engagement with the exhibition in a parallel networked space and time, integrating the sensibility and methodology of Johnson's practice itself.

54 György Galántai, "The Garden of Correspondence," 1997, artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/Ray/Ray_about.html.

55 Galántai, "Garden."

56 Galántai, "Garden."

Figure 10.6: György Galántai, “Structure of the Artpool Ray Johnson Internet Site,” 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/Ray/map.html>

Just as Galántai made drawings of the exhibition design for Ernst Museum (fig. 10.5), he also drew a sitemap for the online exhibition. (fig. 10.6) The sitemap organizes an online exhibition in what Michael Connor has called ‘informatic space’,⁵⁷ non-contiguous with the physical space denoted by the exhibition design for Ernst Museum. The former takes the silhouette of a Ray Johnson drawing as a spatial blueprint, whereas the exhibition design negotiates the pre-existing dimensions of the physical gallery. The left half of the sitemap is designed around one of Johnson’s long-nosed portrait drawings. (fig. 10.7) Johnson takes his predilection for phallic caricature further here, as the nose extrudes diagonally from the face in the top left of the page traversing the page to the bottom right. As with the web design technique employed in *UNI/vers()*, the drawing is rendered as an image map in eight sections, each hyperlinked to a different section of the online exhibition.

57 Michael Connor, “The Rules of the Game, Curating Online Exhibitions, Part 2: Mise-en-scène,” *Rhizome Blog*, April 12, 2021, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2021/apr/12/the-rules-of-the-game/>.

Figure 10.7: Artpool's "Ray Johnson Space," 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/Ray/raymap.html>

Some sections and material are common to both the online and offline exhibition. Still, the online visitor has the choice to navigate the exhibition from multiple entry points, from where they drift through links and pages, increasingly disorientated and not always able to retrace their steps. The journey is sometimes interrupted by a broken link, leading to ejection from the site or reversed re-entry through the back button. Questions and decisions on which path to take and the experience of coming to the end of a line, remind us that subjective perception, history and biography is partial. No matter how detailed the research, how exhaustive the archiving, gaps in our consciousness always remain, even beyond the comprehension of our Flusserian 'cosmic brain'.⁵⁸

58 "Telematic Society," artpool.hu, 2004, <https://artpool.hu/2004/telematic.html>.

** /* archiving
artpool.hu */ **

Pioneers of late twentieth century networked art practice in so many ways, it is not surprising that Artpool were early adopters of the web. artpool.hu is a unique example of the emergent digital culture of that period and remains intact, predicated by its HTML substrate and interface to this day, over twenty-five years later. Of course, the web is a different place then and now. Then, the possibilities of accessing and sharing information across *cyberspace*, transcending borders and boundaries, felt exceptionally liberating. As a rapidly expanding resource, the web was understandably attractive to Galántai, particularly given his fascination and desire to exchange, process, and redirect information. The web provided untold possibility for a new type of digital samizdat culture and provided a direct channel of artistic communication between the contemporary Hungarian and international neo-avant-garde.

The digitization of *Radio Artpool*, for example, extends a notion of broadcasting across geographical space and historical time through ever-accelerating technological exchanges. This notion of the internet as a channel or medium of communication seems to be of primary importance in the founding and development of artpool.hu. Also, as can be seen from *UNI/vers(,)* and *Networker Bridge*, an interactive interface able to sustain temporal engagement with documented artefacts of networked art as hypermedia, in effect improving while preserving the original. To Galántai, cyberspace appears as a site of abstraction, conceptualization, extrapolation, and speculation: a space of transcendence rather than immanence. His sitemap for the *Ray Johnson Website* and his exhibition design for the *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* exhibition at Ernst Museum face different directions from the same point of origin, both drawn on paper. Both are representational, but one will become a work in itself exhibited online as part of the exhibition, while the other remains paratextual in relation to the offline exhibition.

artpool.hu does not intend to replicate the entire physical archive of Artpool Art Research Center. Neither does it account for all of the digitized archival material, as can be seen from the sound⁵⁹ and video⁶⁰ archiving

59 The sound archiving project of Artpool Art Research Center, accessed March 12, 2021, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/sound/projekt.html>.

60 The video-archiving project of Artpool Art Research Center, accessed March 12, 2021, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/video/projekt.html>.

projects, indexes of which appear on the site nonetheless.⁶¹ The central value of artpool.hu at this point of the transition of the archive to the museum, is as an index for online and offline archival holdings and an online platform to share existing digitized material in the interests of accessibility and research. To do anything else, to become an 'active archive' in a wholly different media landscape where self-archiving and machine learning are ubiquitous conditions of social and cultural production would require reconfiguration and rematerialization of artpool.hu's historical HTML substrate to reset its coordinates within the media present. However, let us remember that as the abacus is as much digital technology as the smartphone, artpool.hu's status as a historical digital artefact of late twentieth century networked art culture may yet become a source for remediation of future networked art practice itself.

61 The list of audio cassettes and videos digitized in the framework of Artpool Art Research Center's sound and video archiving project artpool.hu, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://artpool.hu/sound/index.html> and <https://artpool.hu/video/index.html>.

Biographies

Zdenka Badovinac is a curator and writer, who has served from 1993 to 2020 as Director of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana, comprised since 2011 of two locations: the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova. In her work, Badovinac highlights the difficult processes of redefining history alongside different avant-garde traditions within contemporary art. Badovinac's first exhibition to address these issues was *Body and the East—From the 1960s to the Present* (1998). She also initiated the first Eastern European art collection, Arteast 2000+. One of her most important recent projects is *NSK from Kapital to Capital: Neue Slowenische Kunst—The Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia*, Moderna galerija, 2015 (Traveled to Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, 2016; Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, 2016; and to Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid, 2017); *NSK State Pavilion*, 5th Venice Biennale, 2017, co-curated with Charles Esche; *The Heritage of 1989: Case Study: The Second Yugoslav Documents Exhibition*, Modena galerija, Ljubljana, 2017, co-curated with Bojana Piškur; *Sites of Sustainability Pavilions, Manifestos, and Crypts, Hello World. Revising a Collection*, Hamburger Bahnhof—Museum für Gegenwart—Berlin, 2017; *Heavenly Beings: Neither Human nor Animal*, Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, Ljubljana, co-curated with Bojana Piškur, 2018; her most recent book is *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe* (New York: Independent Curators International—ICI, 2019). Badovinac is a founding member of L'Internationale, a confederation of seven modern and contemporary European art institutions. She was Slovenian Commissioner at the Venice Biennale from 1993 to 1997 and 2005, and Austrian Commissioner at the Sao Paulo Biennial in 2002, and was the President of CIMAM, International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art, 2010–13.

Judit Bodor is a contemporary art curator, educator, and researcher. Between 1999 and 2005, she worked at Artpool Art Research Center, Budapest. Since moving to the UK, she has worked in artist-led organizations including East Street Arts, Leeds and WAVEparticle, Glasgow, and as a lecturer at Dartington College of Arts, York St John University, and The Glasgow School of Art. She has a practice-led Ph.D. in curating awarded from Aberystwyth University and her research focuses on artist archives and curating the histories and practices of post-1960s performance art and networked art practices. Her recent projects include *Alastair MacLennan: LIM(I)NAL* (2020), *Contexts, 10th Festival of Ephemeral Art* (2019), *Left Performance Histories* (2018), and *Silent Explosion: Ivor Davies and Destruction in Art* (2015–16). She is also co-founder/editor of Gordian Projects, an independent artist-led not-for-profit press, and currently works as Baxter Fellow in Curatorial Practice at the University of Dundee.

David Crowley teaches at the National College of Art and Design (NCAD) in Dublin. His books include *Warsaw* (2003) and three volumes co-edited with Susan Reid: *Socialism and Style: Material Culture in Post-war Eastern Europe* (2000); *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (2003); and *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (2010). Crowley also curates exhibitions including *Cold War Modern* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2008–2009 (with Jane Pavitt); *Sounding the Body Electric: Experiments in Art and Music in Eastern Europe* (Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2012 and Calvert 22, London, 2013); and *Notes from Underground: Art and Alternative Music in Eastern Europe 1968–1994* (Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź, 2018 and Akademie der Künste, Berlin, 2018), both with Daniel Muzyczuk. His edited volume *Ultra Sounds: The Sonic Art of Polish Radio Experimental Studio* was published by Kehrer in 2019.

Lina Džuverović is a curator and Lecturer in Arts Policy and Management at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her research focuses on feminist art histories and ways in which the sphere of contemporary art can become a site of solidarity and community-building. Previously Džuverović taught at the University of Reading; at IZK—Institute for Contemporary Art, University of Technology (TU), Graz; was artistic director of Calvert 22 Foundation in London; founding director of the London-based agency Electra; and has held curatorial roles at ICA and the Lux Centre, London; and at Momentum Biennial, Norway. She was awarded the 2006 Decibel Mid-Career Curatorial Fellowship by the Arts Council England. Selected curated and co-curated projects include *Monuments Should Not Be Trusted* (Nottingham Contemporary, 2016),

Sanja Iveković: Unknown Heroine (South London Gallery and Calvert 22 Foundation, 2012–2013), *IRWIN: Time for a New State* (Calvert 22, 2012), *27 Senses* (Chisenhale Gallery, London, 2010; Kunstmuseet KUBE, Alesund, Norway, 2009), *Favoured Nations—Momentum*, 5th Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art (Moss, Norway, 2009), *Perfect Partner* by Kim Gordon, Tony Oursler, and Phil Morrison (Barbican Centre, London and across Europe, 2005) and *Her Noise* (South London Gallery, 2005).

Daniel Grúň is an art historian, curator, and writer. He studied art history at Trnava University (Slovakia). In 2009, he completed his Ph.D. thesis on art criticism of the 1960s in Czechoslovakia. He co-curated the first international retrospective *Július Koller: One Man Anti Show* and has been writing on artist's archives, self-historicization, and legacy of neo-avant-gardes. Currently, he teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Bratislava, and conducts research at the Institute of Art History, Slovak Academy of Sciences. Recently he co-edited volumes *White Space in White Space, 1973–1982. Stano Filko, Miloš Laky, Ján Zavarský* (Vienna, 2021), *Tomáš Štrauss: Beyond the Great Divide: Essays on European Avant-gardes from East to West* (Dijon, 2020), and was editor of *Subjective Histories: Self-Historicization as Artistic Practice in Central-East Europe* (Bratislava, 2020). He is in charge of the Július Koller Society, lives and works in Bratislava.

Roddy Hunter is an artist, curator, educator, and writer. Following formative performance art interventions in urban spaces in Glasgow in the early 1990s, performances, and exhibitions of his work have since taken place across Europe, North America, and Asia. In the mid-1990s, he was a member of Hull Time Based Arts and developed an intertwined curatorial practice including projects in a range of art spaces, galleries, and museums. He gained an MA in Contemporary Arts from Nottingham Trent University in 1998 and his Ph.D. from Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, University of Dundee in 2019. His most recent work engages with art, curating, networks, and performance after the internet, such as through his curatorial project, *The Next Art-of-Peace Biennale* (www.peacebiennale.info). He has held a number of academic roles in English universities and is presently Director of Teaching and Learning, School of Art, Design and Architecture, University of Huddersfield.

Emese Kürti is an art historian, researcher, art critic, and head of department of Museum of Fine Arts—Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest. Pre-

viously she worked at the Ludwig Museum—Museum of Contemporary Art (2009–2015), then she was the founder and head of the private research institution acb Reasearch Lab (2015–2018). She was a lecturer at the University of Fine Arts and the Central European University. In 2013 she received the best art critic prize of the Hungarian Section of AICA. She holds a Ph.D. in Film, Media and Contemporary Culture from Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Her dissertation, published in 2018 at L'Harmattan, grounds a new narrative for Hungarian action art and happening practices based on a musical genealogy. In the last few years, she has been focusing on the transregional artistic collaborations between Hungary and Yugoslavia (*Screaming Hole. Poetry, Sound and Action as Intermedia Practice in the Work of Katalin Ladik*, 2017), the issues of the minority and the self-historicization and institutionalizing ambitions of the neo-avant-garde.

Zsuzsa László is a researcher at Artpool Art Research Center and is completing her Ph.D. in Art Theory at the Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest. Her dissertation discusses the emergence and critique of the concept of East European Art. Between 2009 and 2018, she was the curator of tranzit.hu, and she is still member of its board. In her research and curatorial activities, she explores transnational exhibition histories in the Cold War era, and their interconnections with cultural diplomacy and decentralized understandings of neo-avant-gardes. Recent projects and publications she (co-)curated and co-edited include *1971: Parallel Nonsynchronism* (Municipal Gallery, Budapest, 2018–19), *Creativity Exercises* (GfZK, Leipzig, 2014; tranzit.hu, Budapest, 2015; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw, 2016; and the book published by Sternberg Press, 2020), *Sitting Together* (tranzit.sk, Bratislava, 2016), and *Parallel Chronologies* (2009–21).

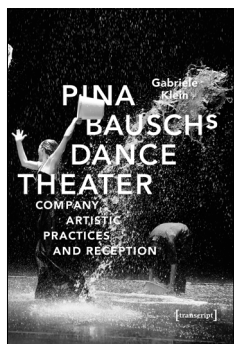
Karolina Majewska-Güde is a researcher, art critic, and curator. She works as an Assistant Professor at the Institute of History and Theory of Art at Katholische Privat-Universität Linz. Her research focuses on East-Central European neo-avant-gardes, feminist art histories, contemporary issues of circulation, translation, and production of knowledge through art-based research. Majewska-Güde is a member of the curatorial collective piske/mówi/robi devoted to curating talks, exhibitions, and workshops focused on artistic knowledge production and translations of artistic archives.
<https://karolinamajewska.wordpress.com>
<https://pizemowirobi.tumblr.com>

Sven Spieker teaches in the Comparative Literature Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara. He specializes in modern and contemporary art and culture, with an emphasis on Russia and Eastern Europe, and a special interest in issues related to documentary and knowledge production. Spieker has lectured and published on topics ranging from the historical avant-garde (Malevich, Rodchenko, Dziga Vertov) to late-twentieth-century art practice, from Wolfgang Kippenberger to subREAL. His books and articles have appeared in German, Korean, Russian, Swedish, Polish, and English. Spieker's latest book publication is an edited volume devoted to the relationship between art and destruction (MIT Press/Whitechapel Gallery, 2017). The monograph *The Big Archive* focused on the archive as a crucible of European modernism (MIT Press, 2008; Korean translation, 2014). Spieker is the founding editor of *ARTMargins Print* and *ARTMargins Online*. Current projects include a critical anthology of conceptual art in Eastern Europe and a study of education-based art in the 1960s.

Kristine Stiles (Ph.D. 1987, University of California at Berkeley) is France Family Distinguished Professor of Art, Art History and Visual Studies at Duke University where she also holds a secondary appointment in the Theater Department. She was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of the Arts from Dartington College of Arts and the University of Plymouth in England (2005). Stiles is an art historian specializing in contemporary art, artists' writings, and interdisciplinary experimental conceptual and performance global art; and she has taught "Trauma in Art, Literature, and Film" for twenty-eight years. She co-authored with Peter Selz, *Theories & Documents of Contemporary Art* (1996, 2012), and is the author of *Concerning Consequences: Studies in Art, Destruction, and Trauma* (2016) and *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (2010), among other publications. She curated and wrote for the catalog for numerous exhibitions, including *Rauschenberg: Collecting & Connecting* (2014–15); *Jean Toche: Impressions from The Rogue Bush* (Imperial Presidency (2009); *States of Mind: Dan & Lia Perjovschi* (2007); and *Raphael Montañez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche, 1968–1988* (1988). She has authored over one hundred published essays and wrote "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions," a monograph-length catalog essay for *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979* (MoCA, Los Angeles; MAK, Vienna; Museu d'Art Contemporani, Barcelona; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 1998–99. She is an equestrian.

Tomasz Załuski is an art historian and philosopher, assistant professor at the Department of Cultural Research at the University of Łódź and at the Department of Art History and Art Theory at the Władysław Strzemiński Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Poland. His research interests include modern and contemporary art; social, political, and economic contexts of artistic culture; artistic activism and self-organization; documentation and artistic archives. He is the author of the book, *Modernizm artystyczny i powtórzenie. Próba reinterpretacji*, 2008 (Artistic modernism and repetition: An attempt at reinterpretation); and the editor of the volumes: *Sztuki w przestrzeni transmedialnej* (Arts in trans-medial space), 2010; *Skuteczność sztuki* (The effectiveness of art), 2014; *Socrealizmy i modernizacje* (Socialist realisms and modernisations) with Aleksandra Sumorok, 2017; *Wideo w sztukach wizualnych* (The video in the visual arts) with Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, 2018; *Galeria Wschodnia: Dokumenty 1984–2017 / Documents 1984–2017*, with Daniel Muzyczuk. He is also an editor of the journals: *Art and Documentation* and *Hybris: The Online Philosophical Magazine*.

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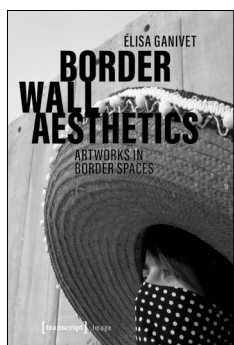
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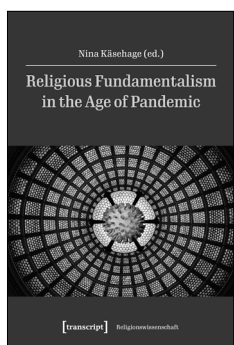
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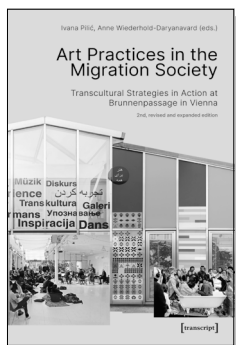
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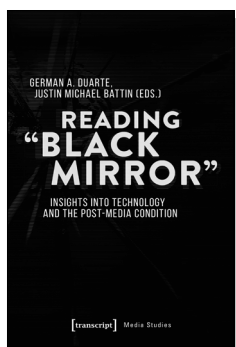
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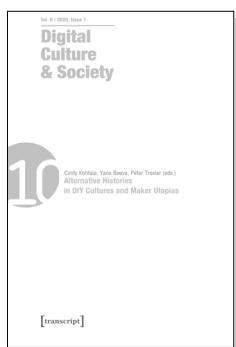
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